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Web Novel
Arc
6
Hall of Memories
Re:ゼロ
Re: Life in a different world from zero
から始める異世界生活

Manifesto

Hello, this is Phantaminum. This project was motivated by my dissatisfaction at currently existing compilations of the Web Novel translations, namely lack of proofreading, size, and lack of standardization in formatting and naming conventions. This should make it easier to search for information. I have also decided to add colored Light Novel illustrations (with sources) whenever applicable and available (do note that because of the changes from Light Novel to Web Novel, some will be missing). You may find a list of all volumes I have already finished, or plan to work on, at the final chapter of this document.

This document is a compilation of all the Re: Zero Web Novel Chapters that correspond to Arc 6, titled **"Hall of Memories",** which were adapted in Light Novel Volumes 21 through 25, with the exception of a portion in Volume 25, which was moved to Volume 26. Sources are as follows:

- **Remonwater** (website) – Chapters 1 to 9;
- **Witch Cult Translations** (website)**, composed by Ringo, Ice/Ice_Occultism, Hedge, GracedHarperd, PaperKaminari, DiscountAnon/Nanashi-tan, with assistance from Erifuru of Kotodama Translations (**website**) and u/WintryOne** (profile) – Chapters 10, 11, 14, 15, 17-32, 35 (partially), 36 to 88
- **Mahubrobin** - Chapters 12, 13 and 16 (marked as LQ).
- **TranslationChicken** (website) - Chapters 33, 34, and partially 35.
- **Eminent Translations** (website) - Chapters 89 and 90.

The original translations have been proofread, edited and reformatted by myself, on top of whatever original editing and proofreading work was done by the original translators and respective proofreaders. This means that the formatting should remain consistent no matter which source is used.

I have tried to follow naming conventions present in the Light Novel as much as possible, only diverging when community-given names differed greatly. I have also tried to conserve as many of the original translator notes from the original translators as much as possible.

As a fun quirk, I have done something which I admit is probably not consensual: to flip the languages whenever someone speaks what is colloquially coined as Engrish. This means, that in the case where the story uses English, where possible, Japanese will be written as Romaji (Japanese in Latin script). When

this happens, a note was added with the original expression (and its translation), and the new expression that was converted to Romaji. Basically, I made everyone using Engrish look like weeaboos.

I hope you enjoy this as much as I did. If you have anything to point out, I'm often lurking in pretty much every Re: Zero discussion site, be it the Reddit Discord Server, the Subreddit, or 4chan's /a/ board. Alternatively, feel free to use this document to suggest corrections or other changes.

P.S.: Much thanks to Joy Kirbs from Discord for aiding me in redesigning the covers.

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Web Novel Volume 21

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Volume
21
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Arc 6 Chapter 1 – The Dragon Carriage's Way Back

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 1 "A Reason to Bring You", Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

——Natsuki Subaru's group continued to head directly east upon leaving the city of Pristella.

They were heading towards the eastern edge of the world—— the area in which the Augria Sand Dunes were contained, a plot of land with a rich history of having the Witchbeasts that have existed there for hundreds of years reject every existence from stepping foot onto their territory.

It contained Miasma that would cause travelers to lose their sense of direction and gnawed at their hearts.

It contained groups of Witchbeasts as evil vanguards, who would indulge themselves in devouring human lives.

And then, there was the person who sought world peace—— the person at the Watchtower, who determined each and every one of the successes and failures made by those who came close. This person was the Sage, Shaula.

???: "Knowing that alone, it feels like we're lining up for suicide."

Just being reminded of the obstacles that were ahead was enough to cause dejection.

In reality, those that journeyed towards this place, while fully knowing what awaited them, were perhaps beings like suicidal people, or perhaps Witch Cultists. At any rate, it seemed like they were nothing but people with brain abnormalities.

However, these people were neither of the above, and possessed no intention to die. It was rather the opposite; they intended to live.

They would provide a path of life, to each and every one of the people who had lost their way of living.

They had begun this expedition in order to obtain this seed of hope.

???: "…Nevertheless, it's strange."

While imagining the swaying of the dragon carriage, Subaru whispered these words to the faces in front of them. When the people in the guest room heard his whisper, every single one of them had their eyes turn towards Subaru.

A total of four glances came his way—— adding in Subaru to the other people in this carriage, would make for a final sum of five passengers. This was what the situation looked like.

???: "Strange? Did something happen?"

Subaru: "No, it's nothing important, Emilia-tan. It's just, wellll~, it's just that I feel it's quite unexpected all these faces to be sharing the same dragon carriage and getting along so well."

Subaru responded this way as he brushed off Emilia's question.

To Subaru's right and left, securing both his sides, were Emilia and Beatrice. These were his allies. It was a given that these two would be with Subaru, but still, the question at hand would regard the two people up front.

???: "Well, it may be normal for ya to feel like that. Actually, I thought it was really surprisin' too. So it'd be natural for Natsuki-kun to feel uncomfortable, huh."

???: "…Ahh, that is correct."

The person who let out a high-pitched laughter and spoke with a Kansai dialect, or rather, Kararagi dialect, was Anastasia. After her reply in fake Kansai dialect, she gazed towards him with a meaningful look while feeling her hair.

Anastasia: "Though, if we're gonna talk exclusively 'bout bein' uncomfortable, I ain't so sure ya can beat Julius-san here."

Julius: "How harsh. However, please do not worry—— I am also a Knight at heart. Just a single night is enough for me to adjust my heart. Not to mention that a few days have already passed… I promise to never to show a sight similar to the shamefulness I displayed the other day ever again."

Anastasia: "So graceful. I'll be takin' ya on yer word, then."

The manner in which Julius bowed in reply to Anastasia's banter-like remark was much like how he acted previously.

But of course he would. He had sustained damage incurred by the Authority of Gluttony; but to be specific, it had borne effects on everyone around his person, rather than on himself.

Thus, the people that had changed their behavior had been his friends, rather than himself. He could not conceal just how upset he was upon receiving these reactions. But as he himself had just stated, he seemed to have accepted it with ease.

Subaru: "…You're outrageous."

Albeit he would not let his voice carry such praise, it was a pretty big deal.

That weak part of his heart was not able to clearly express great praise. It was not as if Subaru was unfamiliar with that feeling as well—— the feeling of having your own existence being left behind, having nobody around that shared his own memories.

Natsuki Subaru, able to go back in time with Return by Death as he was, definitely possessed recollections of worlds that nobody else remembered.

If he were to recall a single experience in which he had built up relationships only to have them lost, that would perhaps be the initial days at Roswaal mansion—— those repeated days of his beginning at the Roswaal mansion.

He had been summoned to another world, had struggled at the Royal Capital with the objective of helping Emilia, and then as a result, he had been invited to Roswaal's mansion. He then proceeded to experience four iterations of events before stepping foot into the fifth world.

The memories of the four worlds up until then, were held within Subaru and nowhere else.

Even now, it was difficult to forget the shock he had experienced from being treated as a stranger by the very same people with whom he had built relations with during those days at the mansion.

That pain and sadness would never fade away.

???: "…What is it, I suppose? Subaru, why have you suddenly started petting Betty's head, in fact?"

Subaru: "Don't worry about it. It's just, I'm deeply emotional by the fact you seriously saved me back then. Thankyou thankyou."

Beatrice: "I don't understand, I suppose. Also, my hair is getting messed up so sto… you don't have to stop, but pet it just a little softer, in fact."

Beatrice tilted her head towards Subaru as she occupied the seat half-an-ass away[1]. Just like she had requested of him, Subaru delivered some pats to her head, not allowing him to forget his state of mind at the time he was truly saved.

The only person whose feelings towards Subaru did not change during the loop of days at the mansion, was Beatrice. They had met before Return by Death's save point. So after that, she remained as the one person whose manner of coming into contact with Subaru did not alter.

Moreover, the way he had been saved would also stay a secret to her, for a long, long time.

Subaru: "After that, Emilia-tan saved me, huh."

Emilia: "——?"

Emilia made a curious face in response to Subaru's reminiscence.

Subaru was right here, right now, because he had been saved by her kindness, voice, attitude, as well as the warmth of the lap that she had lent him.

Subaru: "————"

[1] Please let me know if there's an alternate translation for "お尻半個分", which is literally "half-an-ass". Because the use of "half-an-ass" as a unit of measurement is downright hilarious.

That was why Subaru was able to recognize how impressive it was that Julius had actually accomplished it all on his lonesome. It had taken so much help, and so many times, four times' worth of time in fact, for Subaru to overcome what Julius had.

Or maybe, it was because a certain someone was there to lend him a helping hand.

A certain someone that was forgotten by Anastasia; a certain someone that did not seek for help from anyone in his own camp; a certain someone who had his ties severed with the Quasi Spirits whom he contracted with; a certain someone that did not recall his blood brother either.

If that were the case, then he would be grateful.

Julius: "Staring at people's faces for quite a while now… Is there something wrong, Subaru?"

Subaru: "I'm doing nothing wrong. I was just thinking that it's not pleasant to see you smiling with such elegance after someone calls you graceful."

Julius: "Beautifully elegant, that indeed has a splendid sound to it. I had never expected that I would receive praise from you. I am pleasantly surprised… Or well, that may be an exaggeration. Well, is it not a given?"

Subaru: "I didn't mean to praise you, and it does piss me off to hear you put it like that!"

With his same manner from the past—— Or rather, with his reaction that made it seem as if he had become even more skilled with his tongue slips, Subaru ended up being the one annoyed.

The evident frailness on his face back when in his brother's hospital room at Pristella had been hard to digest. Subaru had recollections of that time, when a lack of satisfaction was evident in his expression prompting Subaru to complain. However, all of that seemed like completely forgotten history now.

Emilia: "You and Julius, get along. Hmm, were you like this before the way you are right now?"

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, you got it wrong. There is no way me and this guy get along well. Did you see my face? My eyes had the scariest look ever. Although, that's just my viewpoint."

Emilia: "Really? I don't think you're right, but… Ah, I'm not talking about the look you had in your eyes. I'm talking about you saying that you two don't get along well. Subaru's eyes were the same as ever, they were reaaally scary."

Subaru: "The same as ever, reaaally scary!?"

Emilia: "Well for me, I like Subaru's eyes. I'm being truthfully truthful."

Subaru: "Ah, dammit. How I wish that part about my eyes was cut out from the audio recording…"

Emilia let out a wry smile as she filled Subaru with regret. She then turned towards Julius with an inquisitive look, causing him to take a glance towards Subaru.

Julius: "I myself have no room to deny those words. In reality, to say that me and him are close… would not be the most correct statement. Although in my eyes, we are compromising with each other, despite how things may look."

Subaru: "To put it as compromising, that's already condescending. Humble down there a bit… it's going to piss me off even more."

Julius: "What an abrasive point of view. Can you tell him that too?"

Julius sought Emilia's agreement on the matter, but she reacted to their exchanges by brushing up her hair and,

Emilia: "Just as I thought, you are reaaally close, right…?"

Subaru: "Come on, it should be already clear."

Emilia: "Eh? Well, I guess you are close then…"

There was a slight disagreement with Emilia, but Subaru and Julius acted as if nothing had happened. This made Emilia become more and more baffled. Anastasia tried to restrain herself from laughing, letting out chuckles with a smile.

Anastasia's reaction caused Julius to suddenly loosen his lips, as if indicating that he had calmed down—— That transient master-servant relationship was hardly strange to Subaru, being someone who was familiar with the other side of it.

The Anastasia at hand differed from the genuine Anastasia Hoshin, and was a fake, merely a fake.

Anastasia's body was currently being used by the Artificial Spirit Echidna—— otherwise known as Eridna[2]. This so-called Eridna had no intentions of taking over her body, but he was unsure of how much he could trust her. Being someone who was aware of this situation, the one thing that Subaru did not fail to do was to prevent those unaware of the situation, like Emilia and Julius, from realizing it.

Beatrice: "…Subaru, cut it out, in fact."

Beatrice called out to Subaru, who was surely in a state of deep thought. This girl's hair was in a messy state, as Subaru was petting her head all throughout this period of silence. Her cute face had a sour look.

Subaru: "Ohhh!? My bad, Beako! Your cute appearance is a mess… your hair's all messed up now."

Beatrice: "Perhaps you shouldn't make it sound like Betty's cuteness is ruined from just her hairdo, I suppose! Moreover, your face is starting to look scary, in fact."

Half-an-ass away from Subaru, Beatrice spoke while frantically fixing her messed-up hair with her hands. Subaru let out an "Oh", preventing himself from talking, as Beatrice held a face that made it look like she thought him helpless.

Beatrice: "There's no point in making such an excessively worrisome face, I suppose… Betty will take care of it, in fact. If something happens, Betty will notice it much faster than Subaru, I suppose."

Subaru: "…Yeah."

Beatrice spoke these words in response to Subaru's anxiety. Beatrice—— the other person besides Subaru who was aware of Eridna and how she was replacing Anastasia.

[2] Localization, and punny at it. This is written "襟ドナ", where "襟", read "eri", means "scarf", and "ドナ" is the "-dona" part of Echidna's name, "エキドナ"

Originally, Subaru had promised to keep it a secret for two reasons: first, to avoid causing any unnecessary commotion about it; second, because Eridna had claimed to have no intentions to snatch control of Anastasia's body. However, Beatrice would be the only one to realize if something happened, albeit belatedly.

They both were the same type of Artificial Spirit, two beings sharing a relationship with the Witch Echidna. If it seemed like Eridna was planning something, Beatrice would surely sense it.

Although, if he were to consider Beatrice's emotions, he did not feel like it was very advisable for Beatrice to get involved with Echidna, but,

Beatrice: "Putting your unnecessary suspicions aside, it's fine that Subaru acted like Subaru and sought help from anybody without caring about who it was, just like you always have, instead of worrying about it alone, in fact. Though, you came to Betty first, I suppose. I'll give you my praise this time for that, in fact."

She replied with this, so that was the end of that.

Emilia: "——I see it."

Just when he thought that the dragon carriage had fallen into a state of silence, Emilia suddenly whispered these words.

It seemed that Emilia had seen their destination afar, as she gazed out the window of the dragon carriage. Subaru also understood that the view out the window was changing into familiar scenery.

Subaru: "What a nostalgic road. We'll arrive at Roswaal's mansion soon, huh."

He murmured these words, first making sure to restrain his feelings from being near their first checkpoint, remembering their original goal.

This group's destination, as mentioned before, were the Augria Sand Dunes—— the place where they would seek to consult Sage Shaula. However, they had already arranged to stop by Roswaal's mansion on the way, as so to prepare for their trip and to make a stop in their long expedition.

There were many things that they wanted to talk to the fellow member of their camp about, including the incident at Pristella and the occasion of getting to speak with the Sage.

Also, moreover——

Subaru: "It's not just a simple stop."

There was meaning in dropping by Roswaal's mansion before beginning their expedition to meet the Sage.

When looking at the big picture, its meaning would be meager, and small to the world. However, through Natsuki Subaru's small human eyes, it possessed great potential.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru squinted his eyes to envision the Roswaal mansion, so distant that could not yet be seen.

Each of the four people inside the dragon carriage were looking at Subaru. Various emotions were held by the colors of their eyes, but Subaru had no composure to take notice of any of their glances.

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When the dragon carriage arrived at Roswaal's mansion, more than one hour had gone by past noon.

The long migration from the city of Pristella, which had taken about ten days, went on a temporary hold.

???: "Subaru!"

Subaru: "Ohh, Petra, woahwah!?"

They rode the ground dragons towards Roswaal's mansion, gave their thanks to the coachman, and then got off the carriage. A petite maid rushed towards Subaru from the mansion, and jumped at him with unrestrained force.

She came into his chest with might and force, and Subaru somehow managed to catch her while backing up. He then petted the head of the girl who had flown into his arms.

Subaru: "Petra, if you do that so suddenly, you'll startle me, you know. I've been gone for nearly a month now, but have you been doing well?"

Petra: "I've been fine, as you can tell. However, Subaru…-sama has been having it rough, right? I've been worried ever since that letter came in two days ago. You were injured so much again, right? Can you handle the pain?"

Subaru: "Embarassing, embarassing."

Petra touched Subaru's body to confirm his pain as her reddish brown-colored hair swung back and forth. As subaru reacted to this with a wry smile, other people got off the dragon carriage.

Subaru: "Hey, Petra. Do your job as a maid of the mansion properly. If you don't, Ram and Frederica will get mad at you."

Petra: "…Okay. Tell me about what happened later."

She returned promptly, but it seemed like Petra's trust had been thoroughly damaged.

Petra's worry would be inevitable if he told her about how he got involved in what seemed to be a city-wide uproar to try and obtain the crystal. Though, it was not something that Subaru intended to cause for the Witch Cult. However, that excuse would also be meaningless.

It would be pointless, considering the truth was that most of the Witch Cult's purposes were related to Emilia's camp.

Petra: "Welcome guests. Compliments to your efforts to make this long trip. I am Petra Leyte, a maid of this residence. I will be your guide towards the mansion."

Subaru's recollections were put aside, and then Petra let out a vocal message coupled with a dignified gesture.

Julius took Anastasia's hand to help her descend the carriage, and they both had looks of admiration on their face. Also visible was a somewhat prideful look on Emilia's and Beatrice's faces.

Anastasia: "Quite the well-behaved child, even though you're little, huh. You're being thorough with yer trainin'."

Julius: "It certainly seemed like she was a completely different person, with her attitude of jumping at Subaru upon first sight."

Petra: "——How embarrassing."

Julius agreed with the smiling Anastasia, and then Petra's face grew redder and redder from their remarks. Julius looked down at her, then proceeded to look at Subaru, and,

Julius: "I see… I understand the reason why you are given the moniker of Lolimancer."

Subaru: "I'll have you know, Petra isn't as small as a little girl, and even if you call me that, the only loli I will «mance» is Beako. Get your facts straight."

Beatrice: "Betty also isn't a girl that works hard to be used by Subaru at his convenience, I suppose. Subaru, you should get your facts straight as well, in fact."

Subaru replied to Julius's banter in a cold way, and then Beatrice rebuked Subaru in an even more glacial manner.

Subaru's mouth turned into a frown, falling silent, and Beatrice let out a sigh. She then looked at Petra's lower area. She stood aside her, and then made a slight movement to grab onto the edge of the skirt of the latter's maid outfit.

Beatrice: "Also, look, not much has changed throughout Betty and Petra's time, I suppo… Wait a second. Betty feels like Petra has grown a bit, in fact. Her hair has grown a bit too, I suppose…!"

Petra: "It's because one month has passed, and it's also my growth period right now. I will grow, and my hair will grow too, if I don't cut it. Beatrice-chan will stay small, though."

Beatrice: "Wha-what in tarnation, in fact…!"

Petra smiled as she hugged an astonished Beatrice tightly. Continuing to embrace the pouty-faced Beatrice for a sufficient amount of time, she then walked away, speaking, "Well then, allow me to guide you all".

Subaru: "Alright, we'll finally be going to the… Mmgah."

He sought to follow her, but then someone's hand grabbed onto the back of his collar. Upon raising a choked voice, he looked back, only to be surprised by the fact that Emilia was the one who had reached out to his scruff.

Emilia jerked Subaru's chin while holding onto the back of his neck, and directed him towards the dragon carriage behind him.

Emilia: "Subaru, Patrasche doesn't seem to be happy."

Anastasia: "Hm… 'Tis has become a selfish affair, huh."

If one were to throw their gaze towards the ground dragons as per Emilia's point, out of the two ground dragons that they traveled with, it would be noticeable that the beautiful, jet-black ground dragon was glaring at Subaru with frightfully piercing eyes.

That was Subaru's beloved dragon, Patrasche. When Subaru tried to return her look, she turned away bluntly, then letting out a light but very displeased sound.

Emilia: "You seriously weren't able to make up with her, even though you had ten days, huh."

Subaru: "Yeah, I know, but I really don't think it's my fault this time…"

Subaru scratched his head as he thought of what to do about Patrasche, who was leaning onto his belly.

Ever since they'd left the city of Pristella, Patrasche had been giving Subaru the cold shoulder—— or rather, a bit before that. When he went to the ground dragon's stable to pick her up, after the defensive battle against the Witch Cult was done and dusted, she was already in a bad mood.

He didn't talk to Patrasche, as Otto was out-of-commission because of his injuries. However, he had a long-standing relationship with Patrasche. It was about time that Subaru found out what this beloved dragon was so angry about.

Subaru: "That's, well, I know I neglected her during the uproar, and that I even made her feel lonely, but… Guh, foahhh!?"

Emilia: "Subaru!?"

Subaru was on the very end of his statement when Patrasche lashed out her tail at him, causing him to become covered in dirt after taking a direct hit. As expected, Patrasche had no mercy in her aggressive response. If he were to reply to her in a deceitful way, she would come to strike him without any hesitation.

Subaru: "I would've never expected it… To think that I was able to avoid Regulus's attacks before, but can't avoid this, is just…"

Emilia: "Are you alright? Patrasche decided to suddenly wave her tail again, doesn't this mean that you'll get hit once more if you don't say the right thing?"

Emilia made that terrifying point as she went on one knee to lend him a hand. He looked at Patrasche, and she certainly was there, shaking her long tail. She sliced through the air with the end of her tail as if to threaten Subaru. It felt like she was saying that she'd double the power for each mistake he'd make.

He unconsciously lost the ability to speak properly, and his throat became cramped as he realized that he couldn't afford to reply carelessly.

Julius: "Even if you're careless like that, your ground dragon has an overwhelming amount of sympathy towards you anyway."

However, that statement made by Julius, who was disheartened by the guidance's lack of success, would cause the undesirable effect that she would come at Subaru. Subaru pointed at himself and Patrasche in response to Julius's argument, and,

Subaru: "Really? I'm kinda covered in all this dirt, you know? You call this sympathy?"

Julius: "Can you not even feel the proof of deep affection with your own eyes? She is a kind-hearted ground dragon. She is mostly aggravated that she was unable able to help you during that turmoil, and she is mad at you for not seeking for her help. So it might just be indignance, rather than anger, towards you."

Subaru: "What are you saying? Just how high are you going to make her heroine power? Stop it."

The level of correctness of Julius's points was unknown, but at the very least, his words made Patrasche's tail swinging come to an end. Subaru looked at Patrasche once again, and she turned away, just like always, but——

Emilia: "Looking at her now, it seems like she's somewhat embarrassed after hearing that."

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, you noticed that too? I also noticed that. It makes my heart flutter, so don't do that too often please, Patrasche."

He said these words, reached out nervously with his hand, and then Patrasche finally lowered her head, allowing Subaru to touch her body covered with tough scales. And with this, it seemed like the cold war where he had 10 days to make mends ended on a good note.

Petra: "Isn't that enough? Is everything fine now?"

Petra was letting her impatience show through her shouts, as they continued to remain at the mansion's front garden without paying attention to the time. She had come out here having been instructed to guide them, and yet they were still taking so much time.

Petra: "If we don't return soon, Ram-neesama will get mad again and…"

Ram: "——If you can worry about such thngs, that means you were just a little bit short on your efforts."

Petra: "Kyaaa——!?"

Petra, who had been making light sounds with her footsteps, let out a shriek and then straightened her back due to that voice. Upon turning back, she saw a pink-haired maid far away, coming from the direction of the mansion.

It was Ram, no mistake nor doubt about it. Ram slowly turned her gaze towards Subaru's group and the guests after Petra became as still as a stone statue because of her glare, and——

Ram: "Even when I thought that Petra had gotten better at her tasks, seeing this situation on the cusp of recognizing your efforts… Ram is really disappointed."

Petra: "S-sorry Ram-neesama… about my work, you were about to recognize me?"

Ram: "Yes. Your cooking is better than Ram's, your cleaning is more sensible than Ram's, you're better at doing laundry than Ram; and you wake up earlier than Ram, so I was close to recognizing you."

Subaru: "You should have more self-doubt when you point these things out!"

Just how bad was this veteran maid in comparison with this girl who held one year of experience as a maid under her belt? Even if one were to take Petra's ability to learn quickly into account, the hurdle was so low that it wasn't even worth considering.

In response to his shout, Ram snorted her nose with a "Haa", in a way that Subaru was completely familiar with, and,

Ram: "How does one proceed to have doubt about oneself? Ram only holds expectations and self-confidence for herself."

Subaru: "I always felt like that part about you is the one thing that really deserves respect."

Subaru thus responded to Ram's majestic declaration while being astounded.

In reality, there was reason to emulate Ram's optimism—— or rather, there was reason in emulating her fortitude. He just wished that she would be a bit more reflective of herself, but,

Subaru: "If you did that, I guess it wouldn't really feel like you'd be the real Ram, huh."

Ram: "That is a scary thought. Moreover, I do not think it would be ideal to leave guests out here for so long. Let us hurry up and enter the mansion."

Subaru agreed with Ram's dismissive words.

They had taken too much time outside the mansion. It wouldn't be surprising for Frederica or even Roswaal to show up eventually, if they wasted any more time.

The Royal Candidates and the Margrave were all to gather here, to talk about what they would be doing.

Emilia: "Is Roswaal at the mansion proper, right now?"

Ram, who had begun walking to guide the others, tapped Petra's shoulder to relieve her stiffness. At Emilia's call from behind, Ram replied with a "Yes" without taking a look back.

Ram: "Fortunately, he was sojourning at this residence when the letter arrived, so he has remained here. There was a summary in the letter about the Pristella affair… and there should be details to discuss."

Subaru: "Yeah there should be, considering a lot of things did happen…"

Ram: "The number of people here now in comparison to when you first left has changed, huh—— Did Garf and Otto die?"

Subaru: "Like hell I'd let them die! They aren't dead! They're just coming back home later because of their injuries!"

Just as Subaru was about to breach the topic of the letter, his charge was countered. Ram let out a shrug with an indifferent manner in response.

Ram: "I am all too familiar with the depths of men who lack composure. Barusu's especially is one that has an open hole from which his contents are being poured out, so you should be careful. To have people become aware of your depths and then finding out you are empty inside is the worst."

Subaru: "That really hurts, so cut that out! Also, moreover…"

If the letter that had been sent to the mansion before their departure from Pristella—— if those details were written in the letter, they should understand that this was no simple trip back for Subaru and the others.

Therefore, when Subaru attempted to confirm the contents of the second half of the letter, and upon settling the words he would speak, Ram readily raised her finger.

Ram: "I told you, didn't I? Rest assured. Roswaal-sama is at this mansion… Also, preparations have been made for both the Sleeping Beauty and the Confinement Room. Although——"

Ram cut off her words towards Subaru at the end and then gently licked her lips.

She wet her lips with the red tip of her tongue, with a gesture that had a sense of gracefulness embellished somewhere in it, and said this,

Ram: "Although, neither of them were Ram's doings. It was Frederica and Petra's job."

Subaru: "Why did you make a prideful face there?"

Anyhow, even though a whole month had passed until he had met her again, she still remained to be the same.

Arc 6 Chapter 2 – His Way of Providing a Warm Welcome

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 1 "A Reason to Bring You", Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

Albeit this is late in saying, but the base for the Emilia Camp, had been moved to the main residence of the Mathers Territory, different from the mansion that had been burnt to the ground in the past.

However, the layout of the mansion didn't differ from the layout the past one possessed, as it was formatted in a familiar way; the main building was placed in the center, and the west and east wing buildings were established to the left and right. It was also formatted this way so that the spaciousness would be just about the same, so they would seldom become confused when roaming it.

The only problem was that it was just a tad too similar, making it much easier to forget Arlam Village was no longer located nearby. There had been several occasions where Subaru would wake up energetically, seeking to perform radio calisthenics[3] in the village, and then somewhere along that long road, he'd realize he didn't know which way to turn next.

Beatrice would subsequently catch up to him in a fuss, and she would be really angry.

Anyhow, they had arrived at Roswaal's mansion, got welcomed by the same old Petra and Ram, and entered the parlor where Roswaal, the owner of the mansion, awaited them, but——

Roswaal: "Ohhh~, welcome baaack~. It's great that you came baaaack~ safe."

Roswaal sat on the couch as he clapped his hands, welcoming them on their return. Subaru and Emilia were reflexively taken aback by Roswaal's smiling welcome.

[3] Translation note from Remonwater: "Warm-up exercises popular in China, Taiwan, and Japan. For more information, see here."

They looked at his excessive and amicable smile, and then they looked at each other.

Subaru: "…Emilia-tan, was anything weird written in the letter?"

Emilia: "I-I don't know, okay. Moreover, you didn't even go as far as to prepare a weird gift? Because, you know, Subaru and Roswaal have secret talks sometimes, so…"

Subaru: "N-no way! And even if I were to plan on giving Ros-chi a gift, I'd put in my usual gratitude and consult Emilia-tan, Beatrice, Petra, Frederica, Patrasche, and maybe even Ram to help me think of a way to reduce the amount of time and money needed for the gift."

Beatrice: "Those were only names of girls, I suppose."

Subaru: "Isn't it embarrassing for me to ask people like Otto and Garfiel about a gift from a man to another man!?"

Subaru responded to the displeased Beatrice, and then sent a wry smile in response to Emilia's scornful eyes.

Incidentally, he had deliberately left out Rem's name in order to avoid causing anxiety for the others, so not for anyone to misunderstand, he did feel guilty about it. Anyhow, Roswaal, who was witnessing the whole exchange, shrugged his shoulders.

Roswaal: "Whaaat~ a surprising reaction. I worry about you guys' safety, so I wonder what's so weird about me being glaaad~ that you're all safe. It's natural, right?"

Emilia: "That's, true but… Roswaal, you haven't really showed that side of yourself to us that much until now, so…"

Roswaal: "It meaaans~ I've had various changes in my way of thinking this past yeeear~. Shouldn't Emilia-sama be a bit happy about me becoming cooperative?"

Emilia: "Hmm, you're right."

Emilia responded to Roswaal's brazen rejection in a way that was typical of her tolerant self, accepting his change of mind. He nodded his head at Emilia, and just seeing her waving her palms back and forth made Subaru unable to leave it at this inadequate level of trust, but——

Beatrice: “Even if you were to try to understand his way of thinking, it wouldn’t be possible because it’s too odd, in fact. Subaru… Subaru is also a bit like that, but the like of that is more, I suppose.”

Subaru: “You’re being too vague with your words.”

Stroking the head of Beatrice, who seemed to have chosen to put in vague and senile words into her remark, Subaru now stepped into the parlor, following Emilia.

The cheery Roswaal—— they were skeptical about him, but were somehow aware of his ulterior motive. In reality, he actually had just spoken of his motive himself just a moment ago.

Roswaal was seriously glad about Subaru and Emilia coming back safe.

Now that his Book of Wisdom was no longer in his possession, being amiable was the best move he could take in order to fulfill the purpose that he had yet to reveal. His only objective was to have Subaru’s actions break the obstacles that stood in the way.

Subaru: “If you feel that way, then that’s fine. Though, it’d be helpful if you were a little cooperative.”

Roswaal: “You will reach your goal with or without my help. That’s why I believe my cooperation is an unnecessary portion of your power. It really isn’t an eeeeven~ relationship.”

Subaru: “It feels like I’m suffering an arrangement in an RPG where I can’t use a support character normally, it does.”

It was an arrangement where the extremely powerful support character would do anything but participate in the battle.

Roswaal avoiding from participating in battles was much like such a condition; in his case, he would become more and more entertained while he continued to sit back and watch Subaru, someone who believed in his own power to change fate with his ability Return by Death, take desperate measures, continuing to drive himself deeper and deeper into predicaments.

He was a cunning fellow, which made Subaru want to click his tongue.

Anastasia: “——Ain’t it ‘bout time ya introduce us as well?”

Subaru: “Sorry to keep you guys waiting. Roswaal, they’re visitors. Allow them to seat themselves.”

Roswaal: “I’m listening. Nevertheless, those are some interesting faces.”

The girl who was waiting out in the corridor spoke out to the people having a conversation at the entrance. Subaru let out a light apology to them, and then made a hand gesture towards Roswaal, who was sitting at the couch, signaling him to let them in.

Roswaal stood up and then sat back down in the chief seat with dead silence, then directing the two guests over to the visitors’ sofa. Subaru and the others slowly took their places on the sofa that faced Roswaal.

Roswaal: “Welcome, from so far you have come. The last time we spoke to each other face-to-face like this was at the Recognition Ceremony.”

Anastasia: “That’s true. Also, it’s not like we’d spoken to each other in a proper conversation before… This essentially feels like the first time we’ll be speakin’ to each other.”

The Recognition Ceremony that had come up in this conversation was the formal recognition of the suppression of the White Whale, accomplished by a combination of the Emilia Camp, Anastasia Camp, and Crusch Camp, where they had been evaluated.

As the small-scale ceremony had been carried out in the Royal Castle located at the Royal Capital, naturally, every member available immediately after the resolution of the Sanctuary affairs had been present, as the representatives of each camp were to gather.

He had vivid memories of Otto having a tense, pale face, and of the castle shining within Garfiel’s eyes, and Roswaal had nonchalantly decided to participate, even after all the trouble he had put them through. What a guy.

Well he’d been nervous, yeah, but he couldn’t say Emilia was any better than him in nervousness and fidgeting. It made sense, considering how she was being praised for achievements she didn’t even have memory of achieving.

Anyway, that was a meeting from the past. Mutual greetings were carried out in a hurried manner.

And so, the conversation would immediately move onto the main topic, a report about the the city of Pristella——

Roswaal: "——And just like the letter said, Otto-kun and Garfiel have withdrawn because of their injuries. I see, undeeerstood~. These achievements are truly promising."

A sigh of admiration escaped Roswaal, after hearing the report. This made Emilia raise her eyebrows, voicing a "Hey" with a slightly stern tone.

Emilia: "They were injured so badly they couldn't even return. Yet, you still put it like that. What are you trying to say?"

Roswaal: "Let's refrain from jumping toooo~ any hasty conclusions. Yes, it is heartbreaking that they were injured like that, and yes, their forced, temporary withdrawal is no less heartbreaking than their wounds. However, on the other hand, no one in the camp has suffered fatal damage. If you consider the other camps, and taking into account you have encountered multiple Sin Archbishops… Indeed, this outcome really is miraculous."

Emilia: "————"

Roswaal: "Naturally, the scars caused by the Sin Archbishops should be treated promptly, but Emilia-sama and everyone else who endeavored to protect the city did their best so that the damage was kept to a bare minimum. I think that you ought to recognize that for yourseeelf~."

Emilia: "…Oh, thanks."

Her face one of someone who had not been convinced, Emilia delivered her thanks.

In actuality, his words should have sounded like a sound argument. However, it was important to consider the impression one had of the speaker. Subaru had the thought that he was shady, and so all the others probably followed suit.

Roswaal: "Weeell~, putting the question of people's thoughts on me aside, shall we move onto something else—— Incidentally, the person who summoned Emilia-sama to Pristella where such a ruckus occurred was Anastasia-sama, was it not…? What do you have to say about that?"

Anastasia: “It’s inexcusable that she was dragged right into that hubbub. If ya want me to apologize, I’ll do it properly, as I’m mentally prepared to do so.”

Roswaal: “And if you sincerely bow your head, this would end without having you paying back a single diiime~… Oh, but you do not need to apologize to me. Emilia-sama has already turned you down, correct?”

Emilia: “Because, shouldn’t the blame be put on the Witch Cult if they were the ones to cause mischief? Anastasia shouldn’t be responsible for anything, because she merely invited us there. Also, it’s not like we didn’t accomplish the goals for which we were summoned out to Pristella…”

Roswaal cast a side glance, to which Emilia responded by feeling the pendant worn on her neck.

A brand-new, large spellstone was attached to the pendant. At this very moment, a fast-asleep Great Spirit was quietly awaiting for its revival. Obtaining this highly pure crystal gem, which would become Puck’s Anchor—— that was something the camp had set as their goal, and something that had been achieved.

Emilia: “Also, isn’t it possible that the Witch Cult was driven back simply because we happened to be there? If you think about it that way, it should be seen as Anastasia’s achieveme…”

Anastasia: “To think of it like that’d be too favorable to another camp, so I’m gonna stop ya there.”

For some reason, Anastasia was being rescued by Emilia’s words of optimism.

However, Roswaal’s current questioning was just an attempt to keep people in check. In fact, it was plausible that most of the Witch Cult’s targets had been brought into Pristella by Subaru and the others. If that were to be pointed out, there was no doubt the atmosphere would become heavy because of the evil of the Witch Cult.

Thus, it would be in their best interest to solidify the opinion, “Let’s work together. The Witch Cult blows!”.

Subaru: “The other three camps have already agreed on that. One Sin Archbishop was killed, and one was captured… Man, one thing was happening after another with the witch’s cult.”

Roswaal: “Though, their organization skills are a bit dubious. In their case, they’re a group of outlaws that have nothing to do with words such as «cooperation» and «unity». Even if one of them was the last to stand having lost aaall~ of their allies and, that lone lunatic’s morale wouldn’t be damaged in the slightest.”

Subaru: “…I can agree with that.”

Roswaal’s opinion was the same as Subaru’s, so it was probably the correct one.

The so-called “organization” of the Witch Cult was now more of a ragtag gang of lunatics rather than an actual organization. They could not bring themselves to be naive now that they thought lacked organization; they would not be obedient from now on, simple as that.

The remaining Gluttony and Lust’s brutality would never be stopped.

Subaru: “That’s why we need to find a way to resist them. The next thing I’ll talk about is related to that.”

Roswaal: “…Coming in touch with Sage Shaula, hmm~.”

Subaru: “I know that it’s not gonna be easy. But there’s no choice but to try it as long as we can’t come up with any other measure. Finally, an omnipotent and omniscient… Or well, let’s say omniscient. If the Sage’s really like that, there’s no harm in just trying to talk to the person, right?”

Roswaal: “Aaalthough~, everybody in the past couple hundreds of years who’s tried that ended up suffering a big loss by paying with their liiives~.”

He presented this common knowledge, and it certainly was a disturbing view of the situation. However, they had something up their sleeves for that reason.

When Subaru exchanged looks with her, Anastasia replied with a gesture of slight acknowledgement using her chin. Then,

Anastasia: “There’s where I come in. Fortunately, I’ve got a way we can make it to the Sage’s Watchtower safely. So there ain’t a reason to worry about getting lost. Does that calm yer worries?”

Roswaal: “Well, should I truly believe your words just becaaause~…? First of all, if you do have this method, the people who would pay a great sum to know such a thing are many. So why are you the only one aware of it?”

Anastasia: “Money’s certainly important to me, as a merchant—— However, there are things in this world that money can’t replace. This is one such thing.”

Hand upon her thin chest, Anastasia—— Eridna proclaimed that with pomp.

Despite the fact she was pretending to be Anastasia, her word had a wondrous power; a power that astonished even Subaru, one who was aware that it was not her true self at this moment.

Being faced with that Anastasia, Roswaal responded by closing one of his eyes. Glaring at her for a brief period with only a single yellow eye,

Roswaal: “Ohhh~ myyyy~. This is why it’s difficult to deal with those who are cognizant of both fighting and gambling. Moreover, I am sure Emilia-sama has already agreed to this, anywayyy~.”

Emilia: “I’m sorry for making these decisions all by myself, okay?”

Roswaal: “But you won’t stop taking these decisions of your own accord. It is fine, however. You’ll dare to proceed in choosing this thorny path. That’s where he comes into the frame as well.”

Roswaal retorted in a half-hearted manner, though he was interested in how they would get there after all.

The height of the hurdle Subaru had to climb over would become be correspondingly higher, based on the difficulty of the road Emilia had chosen. This was, because he was now the hope that replaced the Book of Wisdom, for Roswaal.

Subaru: “Anyways, as per Anastasia’s information we’ll come across some sort of desert. Although it’ll take a few days.”

Julius: “It is not «some sort of desert», it is the Augria Sand Dunes. You have had this mistake corrected so many times so far, so how about you hurry up and remember it accurately already?”

Julius presented an input of his own as he let out a sigh in reaction to Subaru’s vague memory.

The person that had been watching in silence while sitting on the sofa next to Anastasia the whole time directed his intellectual gaze at Roswaal, and continued,

Julius: “I do believe that this might be a very difficult proposal to accept for Roswaal-sama. However, in the city of Pristella, there remain many who have been exposed to the Witch Cult’s barbarism, and the number of people who are still wounded both mentally and physically is vast. If we could somehow take any action that may pose as salvation, then I would like to wish to have permission to do so.”

Roswaal: “You have quiiite~ the graceful way with words. It appears that you are an owner of extraordinary abilities… But it makes no sense how I have no recollection of that. Which means, that. Riiight~?”

Julius: “————”

Roswaal understood the situation based off his non-existing memories of Julius’s being. The gaze of Julius turned downcast, at which Roswaal rested his chin on the hand of the arm he had placed on the armrest.

Then loosening his lips with a sense of cheerfulness, he——

Roswaal: “You’ve been forgotten by everyone because of the Authority of Gluttony. It feels like you’ve been left behind by the world. In order to break out of the conundrum you find yourself in, you’re looking to pursuit the thin amount of hope that is Sage Shaula. You do not need to make excuses on how it’s for everyone else, you knooow~.”

Julius: “——Kh. By no means am I doing this for selfish reasons!”

Roswaal: “I’m not blaming yooou~. It’s actually a natural thing, and so, I find that way of being preferrable. Doing anything for yourself over doing basically anything for someone else’s sake is a desperate act. Even if other people were to be saved as a result with your actions, while feeling satisfaction and feeling achievement from doing so, there’d be no need to deny your condescending heart.”

Julius’ face stiffened as Roswaal continued slamming him with word upon word.

Under his clown makeup, the smile on his face turned even deeper.

Roswaal: “And even more, if you save yourself, then there’s a high chance that other people will be similarly saved as well. You even carry a just cause to act upon, so there’s no need for you to take a little blame, riiight~?”

Julius: “I…”

Anastasia: “——Margrave Mathers, may I ask ya to stop there?”

Anastasia restrained Julius with her voice, taking his place in confronting Roswaal. She let out an elegant smile and then tilted her lovely head. And then,

Anastasia: “I also ain’t got memories of him, but… even then, this boy seems to be my Knight. That’s why it doesn’t feel to watch him getting bullied while unable to do anythin’ ‘bout it.”

Roswaal: “You’re saying that the bond between a master and a servant still exists between you two, even when he has disappeared from your memories…?”

Anastasia: “I wonder. I ain’t too certain ‘bout that either. Though it did feel natural and pleasin’ that Julius cared for me during the trip… Moreover——”

Anastasia gently raised her finger and pointed towards the sofa facing her and,

Anastasia: “I wanna prevent ya from tearin’ your camp apart if ya keep doin’ that, yeah?”

Roswaal: “——My, oh my.”

In response to Anastasia’s point—— he looked at Subaru, who was on the verge of eruption, and then promptly shrugged his shoulders. Subaru was on the verge of shouting. Naturally, Emilia and Beatrice were on the cusp of doing so as well.

Raising both of his hands in surrender, Roswaal made his statement.

Roswaal: “Okay, okay. I’m sorry about this. Thooough~, I do think that I was just pointing out the possibility of a certain aspect.”

Subaru: “That was unnecessary. You really need to stop fucking around.”

Roswaal: “Was it though? You will most likely come across people who don’t care about how many people benefit from the outcome, and distrustful comrades who bring you down with abusive complaints. It seemed like you weren’t aware of that possibility, so I just thought to advise you to anticipaaate~ it.”

Not doing this for someone else’s sake, but for one’s own.

As a matter of fact, Subaru was experienced in being berated for such actions, which remained in the form of a painful wound.

That had been what he had told Emilia at the Royal Castle; that he was acting for her sake, but her response was that he was acting for his own sake. As a result, he would never be able to forget the heartache that ensued. That was a definite truth.

However, whether that had been the truth or not, there often would be times where people would mention it with the intent of hurting him. But that did not mean that——

Subaru: “It’s not as if the feeling of accomplishment decreases depending on the amount of people who approve of one’s actions. As if this person is like that. Stop it.”

Roswaal: “It cannot be helped, riiight~? Because unlike you, I’m not familiar with his personaliiity~… Although your relationship with him doesn’t seem like the sort a person would have after a few days on a trip.”

Roswaal turned to Subaru, who was about to lose his temper. In just this moment, Roswaal’s eyes, bordered by his long eyelashes, became overcast with a full-blown sense of tragedy. Then,

Roswaal: “This means that you’re the only one who remembers again. Just like in Rem’s case.”

Subaru: “Though, I do wonder what kind of fate this is.”

Roswaal: “It is proof your existence is a special one. You should care for it. You should treasure iiit~—— Because there are many things out there that cannot be obtained even when one wished for them.”

Nobody besides Roswaal himself followed the second half of his emotionful statement.

However, even if he were to continue tp ask him questions until he shed light on it, Roswaal would not let out the truth; henceforth, Subaru quickly gave up on the situation. Anyhow, the things that needed to be said should have been said by now.

Next would be——

Subaru: “Just like the letter said, the Confinement Room and…”

Roswaal: “And the Sleeping Beauty will be taken out, yes. What a drastic measure. I was sure that you really hated people touching her, after all.”

Subaru: “A way to wake her up might be found, so I’ll try it. Isn’t that a given?”

Roswaal: “I was surprised to find out that you’d first try this measure with that girl. You give off the impression of a selfish person, but in reality you punish yourself. Somewhere in your heart, somewhere in the corner of your mind, ever since the onset, you believe that she should be the first to be saved?”

Subaru: “————”

He had hit the bullseye, and Subaru reflexively sunk into silence.

Ever since they had set out on their journey towards the Pleiades Watchtower and up until the time they arrived at the mansion, Subaru had been constantly wondering if bringing Rem along as one of Gluttony’s victims was indeed the right approach.

Of course, he was not averse to waking up Rem, not at all. If there was the possibility that she would wake up, he wished that she would awaken as soon as possible, even if just for a day, even if just for a single second.

However, the certainty of Natsuki Subaru being the one to do it was a different matter.

All those people in the city of Pristella were suffering the same kind of damage as Rem. A situation where those who were sleeping were not even taken into account by their own families, unaware their existence had been stolen.

The more Subaru thought about it, the more he felt the piercing of a strange wedge in his haert.

It was the feeling of guilt from saving her first over a multitude of other people. This was why he had hesitated this time around, on the subject of bringing Rem out, but——

???: “I’ve already convinced Subaru, so there’s no problem.”

Roswaal: “…My my, this is quite surprising.”

In the place of the stricken-silent Subaru, the one replying to Roswaal was Emilia.

Turning his gaze to Emilia, her chest puffed up with pride, Roswaal quizzically closed one of his eyes,

Roswaal: “You say that, but wouldn’t her awakening be troublesome for Emilia-sama? Subaru-kun has strong feelings for that girl, no matter how you look at it. In fact, they’re as strong as the feelings he holds for Emilia-sama…”

Emilia: “Yeah, I think that’s right. Subaru will devote himself to that girl for a while, and he might stop caring about me as well.”

Subaru: “No, under no circumstances would that…”

Happen. It should not happen.

His feelings towards Emilia had never wavered, and he swore they would never either.

However, a different part of him possessed intense feelings for Rem. That was a fact, and just like Emilia said, if she were to wake up, there was no doubt that he’d become devoted to her.

However, Emilia turned to Subaru with a “It’s fine”, then resuming her words,

Emilia: “If it makes Subaru turn away from me, that just means that I’ll be the one this time to do my best for him to turn my way. I’m going to be troubled if Subaru isn’t here after all that. Therefore, I’ll also have you come my way, no matter how madly in love you are with Rem with how cute she is.”

Subaru: “Eh? Emilia-tan!?”

Emilia: “That’s my resolve and that’s what I have decided. And nobody will complain about you saving her—— So it’s fine. Let’s wake up Rem.”

Emilia supported Subaru's decision with her strong words.

Those words somewhat sounded like a confession. It surprised Subaru and caused his knees to shake. On many occasions, Emilia had told him things that sounded like affection. That had indeed happened, but in none of those times did she go over the level of deep affection——

Emilia: "Me, Rem, Beatrice, Petra, Patrasche, Otto-kun, Garfiel, we all want you to be reaaally reaaally happy!"

Subaru: "Though you did mix a ground dragon and men at the latter half of your statement."

She had mixed in a loli at the middle too.

Anyhow, he accepted this, and then Beatrice, who was sitting beside him, poked his shoulder. An "Oh, eh" escaped Subaru's lips, looking towards his side right after. Beatrice had her usual indignant look plastered on her face.

Beatrice: "It's not like I'm going to complain about Subaru's tendency to fool around with girls… But one of his hands should be always free, I suppose. This is Betty's exclusive special privilege, in fact."

Subaru: "…You're ridiculously cute."

Beatrice: "That's a given, I suppose. Betty's adorableness resounds to the gods of heaven and earth, in fact."

He didn't go as far as to care about what the gods of heaven and earth thought of the issue, but it did resound in Subaru's heart.

Backed by both Emilia and Beatrice, Subaru would endeavor to wake Rem up.

——He longer hesitated about doing this.

Subaru: "So that's that, Roswaal. Sorry for being loved so much. Rem will be taken out."

Roswaal: "You'll just surprise Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama when you make them sound like alternates like that. It's fine, do whatever you want. I never planned on stopping you anywaaay~."

Subaru: “Alrighty, then about the talk from before.”

Roswaal: “I was feeling concern and just wanted to make sure that you understood the meaning of those actions. I also hurt your guys’ incredible, nameless Knight, so my apologies.”

Subaru: “It’s okay.”

Roswaal spoke in a way that felt like banter til the very end. Julius on the other hand inhaled slightly, and took turns exchanging looks with Anastasia and Subaru,

Julius: “I am Julius Juukulius. This only remains within his memory as of right now, but I am an Royal Guard of the Kingdom of Lugunica. I am not so inept that my heart would be perturbed by something of this caliber.”

He makes his declaration in such a manner, a splendid job of brushing aside the pestering from the wickedly evil mage.

Subaru: “…Not very firm.”

Julius: “Just whose side are you on, really? I feel like I have been stabbed in the back just now.”

He sneaked in his last statement just after their conversation had been brought to its conclusion.

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The conversation had ended, and Subaru and the others had left the parlor.

They were heading towards the Confinement Room that resided in the east wing of the mansion. Over there, they would come in contact with a person who was possibly one of the key factors in reaching the Augria Sand Dunes.

A year prior to this or thereabouts, a person had been brought along with the residents of the mansion’s migration and had been kept inside the Confinement Room ever since then.

That really was not the type of acquaintance one would wish to come in contact with, nor was it really safe to do, but——

???: “I’m really wondering what kind of results they’ll bring. Making me having that sort of expectations, I wonder if theeey’ve~ perhaps influenced me yeeet~ again.”

Roswaal rested the weight of his back onto the sofa, sinking deeper and deeper into it as these words trickled out of him.

One person was left in the parlor. The sorcerer thought over the lingering memory of the previous discussion, had someone come to mind, and then let out a slight laugh. Then,

Roswaal: “Does this mean that I’m becoming one of his favorite members too? What do you think?”

???: “…You sure say some disgusting things I suppose, is what I think, in fact. You really have no limits to the point it’s frightening, there’s no other way to put it, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “It’s not like I lack principles to go as far as to get close to him with thiiis~ body.”

???: “You were a woman before as well, in fact. Betty is just adequately staying on-guard, I suppose.”

Roswaal made an increasingly cheerful smile, and then the little girl who had responded to his statement—— Beatrice, began playing with her own hair by pulling on it, keeping a composed expression.

It was possibly because she was bored, or perhaps it was a habit she would adopt when starting to get irritated.

Roswaal: “Subaru-kun and the others are going to the Confinement Room, you know? Don’t you think it’s unsafe without you byyy~ his side?”

Beatrice: “A stray that bares its fangs is less troublesome than a pet dog that polishes its fangs, in fact. Which is why I thought to keep that in check properly, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “Calling him a pet dog is truly cruel. But being Teacher’s dog would be something I’d yearn for.”

Beatrice: “You are a deviant beyond saving, in fact… Roswaal, don’t test Subaru too much, I suppose. Betty won’t allow you to provoke him too much, in fact.”

Roswaal let out a smile containing a hint of obscenity, and was properly rebuked by Beatrice and her bitter face. Roswaal removed his smile afterwards, and just like always, he closed his one eye—— his blue eye, returning Beatrice’s look solely with his yellow eye.

Roswaal: “You and I view things a different way. You act carefree, while I act with a single purpose in mind.”

Beatrice: “That would mean that you see a side of me that is completely different from Mother, the Betty that holds Subaru’s hand is several hundreds times better than that, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “That is what I’m refeeerring~ to. It’s fine for you, who put on the airs as the Guardian of the Forbidden Library, to becooome~ as happy as possible.”

Beatrice: “That’s a given, in fact. Which is why I’ll have you allow me to act in order to protect that happiness, I suppose.”

Roswaal, still seated on the couch, and Beatrice standing right before him; with the two’s line of sight at the same height, sparks flew in all directions. Roswaal squinted, as if to attempt to peek into the heart of that round-eyed girl, and,

Roswaal: “With one of the Sin Archbishops being killed, a second one should’ve entered Subaru-kun.”

Beatrice: “…There should be candidates other than Subaru, in fact.”

Roswaal: “But none of them come close to him nor do they overlap with him. Which one will be chosen is a matter-of-course, between the one who only grazes him and the one who overlaps. Cease with the dull pretenses.”

Beatrice: “——I won’t let you say much more, I suppose.”

Beatrice responded to Roswaal’s argument with a voice coated with determination that she had previously hidden.

She grabbed tightly onto her arm’s sleeve, then glared at Roswaal.

Beatrice: “Betty is Subaru’s, in fact. Therefore, Subaru will remain Subaru, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “I don’t mean to hinder yooour~ efforts. The lower the number, the more convenient it is more me. That’s aaall~.”

Beatrice: “——Tch.”

At the very end, Beatrice sent a scathing look towards Roswaal, heading towards the door.

This was the end of the discussion.

Roswaal: “Beatrice.”

Roswaal called out to the girl’s back as she moved away.

Beatrice stopped walking, but did not turn around.

Roswaal: “I want you to be happy, at least much more so than the others. You are… like a younger sister to me, that’s why.”

Beatrice: “——A pretty disgusting thing to say, in fact. Also, you’ll never be like Mother, I suppose.”

Roswaal: “Isn’t that what love iiiis~?”

There was no rebuttal.

There was merely the sound of the door opening and closing, echoing quietly in the parlor.

And after that, there was no further sound being made within the parlor.

Arc 6 Chapter 3 – The Little Girl's Cell

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 1 "A Reason to Bring You", Parts 4-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

???: "How did your talk with Master go?"

Subaru: "You could say that it went the same as usual, and that he irritated me more than usual. You get the point."

???: "Well, I understand what you mean."

Subaru's group had left the parlor, and Frederica had been entrusted with guiding them towards the mansion's east wing.

This scary-faced woman with her beautiful, long blonde hair and courteously-worn maid outfit, finally exchanged polite greetings with Anastasia and Julius as one of the mansion's honest maids—— and then spoke to Subaru, who was walking away discouraged.

Frederica: "Was Garf useful in your journey and in the city? For him to get heavily injured to the point of not being able to come back, even when I told him specific instructions… I am worried about him causing trouble for Emilia-sama and the others."

Emilia: "No, don't worry about it. Garfiel worked reaaally hard, after all. He's resting along with Otto-kun right now, without causing any trouble… Well, I'm not so sure about the «without causing any trouble» part. I hope that's not what's happening. But anyways, we did request that they rest."

Frederica: "My apologies for having my foolish younger brother cause you trouble."

Emilia didn't finish her follow-up much due to the fact she half-doubted it, while Frederica offered her apologies.

Anyhow, Garfiel's behavior worried Petra, Ram, Roswaal, and Frederica, but his mentality had changed in some way or another during the incident at Pristella—— one could say that he had matured. No doubt about it.

To begin with, for a fifteen-year-old boy, Garfiel's strength was already outstanding.

Even considering just how fierce the battles with the Bowel Hunter and the Eight Arms had been, he was still far from being able to boast himself as the strongest. But even then, he certainly possessed a level of strength that contended with not just the Emilia Camp's, but the whole continent's top ranks as well.

His biggest problem? Perhaps his immature mentality, still. Once that mental frailness were overcome however, he would go a level beyond.

Well, there was still a ways to go. That was something that shouldn't be rushed. Steadily and assuredly becoming stronger, stepping firmly on each step of the stairs before moving on to the next stage, was the appropriate way a fifteen-year-old should mature.

And in addition——

Subaru: "There's another reason for him not coming back right away this time."

Emilia: "Is it Mimi?"

Subaru: "There's that too, but."

Emilia cut into the conversation as if through sharp hearing, and he smiled wryly.

Even Emilia, someone whose knowledge of romantic relationships between men and women, seemed to be curious about the love affairs of other people to some extent. She was very interested in Garfiel and Mimi's relationship.

Of course, Garfiel should feel something for Mimi, who had risked her own life to guard his, and she was not shy in proclaiming her affection for him both before and after the battle.

Frankly speaking, there was no man out there who would not waver upon being struck with affection from a girl he didn't hate. Subaru too, was also no exception. He was unable to say anything about that phenomenon, considering he was one that had experienced it before.

He would have to wait and see how Garfiel would respond to Mimi's feelings, considering the fact that his fondness for Ram was clear.

But that was a concern different from the one Garfiel had left in the city of Pristella.

Frederica: "——Subaru-sama? Do you need to ask me something?"

Subaru: "No, nothing in particular. It wouldn't be right for me to talk about this matter."

He looked at Frederica's profile with a profound look, and was questioned about its meaning.

Taking Garfiel's true feelings in mind, Subaru dodged her question. At Pristella, a family that Garfiel worried about—— a family of golden hair and green eyes, traits that would remind anyone of Frederica and Garfiel, who were brother and sister.

Garfiel's relationship with that family was like his relationship with Frederica. It was certain that relationship was something Garfiel wished to report to his family, Frederica and Ryuzu, himself.

Subaru: "So I won't say anything. Natsuki Subaru will leave it at that in a *choukou suteki*[4] way."

Emilia: "Oh, speaking of Garfiel, at Pristella there were some children that were reaaally friendly with him, and they were…"

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, Emilia tan, you're gonna make my monologue go to waste!"

His mediation was about to go to waste, so Subaru literally covered Emilia's mouth to stop her from talking. The synergy would be scary if he were to leave it as it was, so he decided that he would make the time to properly explain the gist of the setting later to Emilia.

Subaru waved his hand with a forced smile at Frederica, whose face became more and more puzzled.

Frederica: "Sorry to interrupt you guys while you're happily heating up your intimacy, but do you have any idea of where you guys are headed?"

[4] Engrish flip. Means "super/ultra cool" (超高素敵), originally "ウルトラク―ル" (ultra cool).

Subaru: "Oh, that place called the Confinement Room. That person we talked about before's there."

Julius: "Hmm, that person, huh—— I wonder if the conversation will go well."

Subaru: "It's something that hasn't been done before, so, dunno. Anyways, I'll at least try asking to make sure."

Julius responded to Subaru's explanation by going into deep thought, his face complex as he follows the latter's back.

In reality, Subaru was also aware of the many problems this proposal had in store. However, if all went well, then they would lower the risk of their journey by a considerable amount.

Emilia: "Also that girl's rather fond of Subaru, so shouldn't it be fine?"

Subaru: "That girl's fonder of Garfiel than she is of me. Maybe she likes him more because he's feline… Hm, we've arrived."

While he was replying to Emilia's optimistic words with a strained smile, Frederica stopped walking. Subaru and Emilia too halted their movements, having entered somewhere with a view and atmosphere distinctively alien in the mansion.

The floor layout was roughly identical to that of the previous Roswaal mansion, however, the basement part of the eastern wing—— this was the only place that was starkly different.

In the central building of the mansion, there was the main center wing that concentrated the facilities needed for daily life. The west wing contained multi-purpose facilities, such as the maids' rooms and the guest's rooms. And then there was the eastern wing, a place that acted as a storehouse/safe for the history and heritage of the ancient Mathers bloodline, such as books.

However, the only place that was different was the eastern wing's basement. There was a clear goal set for the cold, stone room in the basement of the noble mansion.

Anastasia: "Quite the unpleasant atmosphere floatin' 'round this place, huh."

Anastasia snorted her nose, complementing her brief comment on the different atmosphere.

There was no denial to her view on the mood, so it was indeed a clear assessment that everyone agreed with. The atmosphere that drifted about in this level of the mansion could not be described in any way other than "unpleasant".

Anastasia: "It's still different from Miasma it seems, but my body ain't feelin' too good 'bout it for sure."

Julius: "The matter of the building's structure and this facility's purpose in the first place… It may be completely unrelated to that, but I do believe that this structure was ultimately erected due to the presence inside."

Anastasia and Julius looked down at the continuous stairs leading down to the basement of the mansion filled with darkness, as they exchange these words.

The Confinement Room had already been brought to their attention. It seemed that both of them had correctly imagined the sort of establishment that existed in the basement. Or were as close to the right answer as possible.

Frederica: "Well then. I shall be guiding you all, now. Please be careful to avoid having your feet slip."

With those words, Frederica led them down the stairs. Subaru and the rest followed her tall back, headed for the basement. Julius's face indicated that he had steeled himself for what laid ahead.

The footsteps they made while walking down the stone stairs resounded very clearly throughout the space they were in. A cold breeze blew upwards from the basement, causing his bangs to shake slightly, which got on his nerves incomprehensibly.

Frederica: "I am going to open it."

Having descended towards the basement, they were blocked by an iron door standing right in front of them. The door had many solid locks installed onto it. Frederica released several of them, one by one.

The key to the door made a sound, the locks were undone, and then the door opened with a creaking noise. Beyond that gate, a stone pathway laid in front, with yet another door to be found deep inside this place, at the back.

Frederica: "The person you are looking for is beyond this door."

Frederica stepped to the side of the door, making way for them to enter, and then bowed. They gave acknowledging gestures with a nod of their chin in response, and the four people headed straight towards the door, with Subaru in the lead.

——The door at the deepest part of the basement had no lock.

He reached for the doorknob. If he were to push it open, they would surely meet what was inside.

Upon having come in contact with the door, Subaru looked back with baited breath.

Everyone: "————"

Emilia, Julius, and Anastasia all stared at Subaru's actions. The three nodded their heads at Subaru, and he took a deep breath, then putting strength into the hand that gripped the knob.

And with a sound, the door was pushed open——

???: "Roaar, roaaar! I'm gonnaaaa~ eaaat~ yooou~!"

???: "Kyaaa~, help me, nooo~."

???: "Hehehehe. Nobody will come to save you even if you cry for help."

With the door's opening, a lovely voice was heard as the pathway became bathed in light.

On the other side of the open door, a lone girl was to be seen inside the room, a multitude of dolls placed around her. Her back faced the others, as she continued to play with the dolls in her hands.

She changed into an imitative voice, though it was unclear just what exactly she was imitating. Nonetheless, she was pretty into it.

???: "Nope, he's coming. Because he promised to come to me if I was in trouble, after all… Hmm?"

Holding a doll representing a little doll, the child stood up, having suddenly noticed something. Looking back timidly, she sees Subaru and the others standing still at the entrance dumbfounded, and then opened her round, large eyes.

She had braided, light-brown hair, and had simple but lovely facial features.

Subaru: "Sup, how are you?"

Addressing her, Subaru raised his hand, as if nothing had happened at all.

???: "O-onii-san, you idiooot! At least knock before you come iiin!"

Unsurprisingly, he was yelled at as a result of his little prank.

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Subaru: "So yeah, this is the prisoner of this mansion. Meili here will advise us regarding to Witchbeasts."

Meili: "I've been disgraced, onii-san hurt my feelings… Sniffle sniffle…"

Subaru introduced the depressed girl, who was crouching at a corner of the room, surrounded by stuffed toys—— Meili, Julius shook his head, putting his fingers between his eyebrows.

While keeping the girl at the corner of his vision, he spoke this as if blaming Subaru, who had gotten carried away.

Julius: "It was a bit clumsy of me to not have gotten more information about this beforehand… But the poorness of your character is showing. It is inexcusable that you pull these pranks at every opportunity."

Subaru: "I don't think I'm playing around that much, though… Or well, I do agree that it's in bad taste. Also, she really was someone dangerous before, you know?"

Julius appeared to have misgivings of Subaru's justifications. Ignoring those all-suspecting men, Emilia and Anastasia lined up and spoke out to Meili.

Emilia: "Sorry, Meili. We'll scold Subaru later for this, so don't worry."

Anastasia: "My, what a cute girl, ain't she? Beatrice-chan, Petra-chan, ain't this quite tellin' of Natsuki-kun's tastes?"

Subaru: "That's a ridiculous opinion of me. Mind saying something more fitting!? I thought to gather people, and not specifically lolis!"

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by Norvak (source)

There was suddenly some sense of grounding to his nickname "Lolimancer", so he wished she wouldn't say such frightening things.

Putting that aside, Meili hadn't listened to Emilia and her words either, as she was indignant in earnest. In that sense, there was an imbalance in that she possessed child-like sensitivity.

Subaru: "Meili."

Meili: "Can't hear you."

Subaru: "Meili, come on."

Meili: "I don't care."

This was the situation. She was a nuisance, having entered a mode in which she'd refuse to listen.

Thus, Subaru decided to hurry up and bring out the last resort as quickly as possible. Subaru reached around his back, and then showed Meili the ace up his sleeve.

Subaru: "Look Meili. It's a present, take it. It's a new stuffed toy, Darepanda[5]."

Meili: "——! Wow! It's cuteee!"

What Subaru presented Meili with was this stuffed toy, one that he had fixed up during the dragon carriage trip back from the city of Pristella.

As someone who had improved his skills in domestic assistance this past year, Natsuki Subaru's sewing skills had become twice as good as before. He could now produce stuffed toys, and if he so wished, he could maybe even create women's clothes now.

Anyhow, this new stuffed toy was an innovative work, that had merged the panda theme with a "lazy from the heat" taste. He more-or-less felt like he had seen something akin to it before, but since that was something from beyond this world it wouldn't be a big deal, so whatever.

[5] Translation note from Remonwater: "A reference to Tarepanda, meaning «lazy panda». For more information, see here."

And so, he presented the new piece that had this and that to it, and Meili accepted it with glimmering eyes.

Meili: "Cute! It's a new animal! Wonder what I should name it… Okay, I've got it! I'll call this one Big Panda!"

Subaru: "I see you've named it what it literally is."

Putting aside her naming sense, she was extremely skilled at understanding the essence of things.

Hugging the stuffed panda in a loving way, she looked at Subaru and the others with a face that indicated that her mood had been salvaged.

Meili: "By the way, welcome back onii-san, onee-san. Looks like you guys have been away for quite a bit, huh. Petra-chan missed you, you know?"

Subaru: "We were gone for a whole month, after all. And we're going to be away for a while again, so I don't really wanna think about how it'll probably anger Petra, but…"

Meili: "Petra-chan does love onii-san, after all… Hm, new people?"

As she was lining up her scattered plush toys onto shelves, Meili suddenly noticed Julius and Anastasia, which showed on her face. Julius became surprised at that change in mood, but Anastasia simply gave a nod with a composed look.

Anastasia: "Compared to Mimi, it's like the feelin' of bein' manipulated's just the surface."

Julius: "…Now that you say it, I agree. Let us give our thanks to Mimi."

Master and servant display a strange scene of agreement, and after that Julius's eyes swiftly dart around the room. After briefly taking a look at that underground space,

Julius: "Nevertheless, I had assumed that it would be a harsh environment after hearing that it was a Confinement Room… But contrary to my expectations, it seems to be a peaceful place to spend time in."

Emilia: "The person in here is a little girl, so it's not like we wanted to torment her…But, she can't go outside either, so it's complicated."

Emilia lowered her eyebrows, her visage complex.

Just like she had stated, the Confinement Room—— or rather, Meili's living space, to put it bluntly, gave off a very lenient feeling for a place of incarceration.

It did seem cold precisely because of the stone pathway, but there colorful wallpaper and carpet decorated this girl's room, and she was free to do whatever she pleased with how she wasn't even restrained. On the shelves, there were countless stuffed toys that had been crafted by Subaru's hands, along with many books and play equipment.

She was being given food, and there wasn't any problem with bathing or going to the bathroom. In short, it was a place where a Hikikomori[6] could live in peace. It was so comfy that even Subaru wanted to be confined in it. However——

Julius: "It seems that there is a peculiar air, similar to Miasma, leaking endlessly."

Anastasia: "It also seems to be comin' from that girl… is that it?"

In response to Anastasia and the others' look, Meili nodded with a smile on her face.

She had an honest smile, but something emanated from that girl, so dreadful and disgusting that it could not be hidden. That was the biggest reason as to why Meili had been confined here, and was not released.

Subaru: "I did talk about it on the dragon carriage, but this girl actually aimed for Emilia and us others before… Hmmm, so she's like a killer-for-hire. Guess you could put it like that, right?"

Julius: "I feel that is wrong already at that point, but please, continue."

Subaru: "Feels like you're implying something with the way you say that… Anyways, she's a professional killer. So, as for what Meili's small body can do, in short, she can manipulate Witchbeasts. She is a Witchbeast Master."

Meili: "Yep, me and the bad animal-sans get along preeetty well."

[6] Meaning NEET, aka shut-ins that never leave their room.

Meili said that with an "Ahem" as she puffed up with pride, but the contents of her words were shocking.

Witchbeasts were harmful threats to mankind and were never friendly with humans in the first place. It seemed that there was one exception, an arrangement in which Witchbeasts would obey the person who had broken their horn, but——

Subaru: "In Meili's case, the presence of the horn is irrelevant. I'm not too good with that theory so even if I explain it you wouldn't understand."

Meili: "From what Mama said, I play the same role as a Witchbeast's horn. Sooo, I can be friendly with the Witchbeasts."

Fulfilling the role of a Witchbeast's horn—— the meaning of that was obscure.

That being said, it seemed like there had never been any type of research done on the ecology of Witchbeasts. Of course, there was the possibility there were people who hunted Witchbeasts for a living, but even if they held information about their traits, they would not be looking at them from a research point of view most likely.

Emilia: "Initially, Meili came to attack us with one more person. Garfiel defeated that person, and this girl was caught. Ever since then, this girl's always been sheltered by this mansion."

Anastasia: "Why did ya do that much? No matter what'cha say, if she was an enemy before, ya should've dealt with her quickly… Or wait, it doesn't seem like this child can be dealt with."

Emilia: "…There's no way we can even think of killing her. But at the same time, we can't expel her either. Because this girl says that if she gets released…"

Meili: "Mama'll get mad at me. Elsa died, and I failed, so she'll definitely kill me if she finds me. So, staying here is the safest option."

Meili answered with a calm tone, but it seemed like her expression had become clouded.

Meili had lost Elsa, who she worked with, and had failed in carrying out her task. Their guardians were most likely something like professional killer managers, and their failures would definitely never be allowed.

Banishing her, would mean she would receive punishment—— those would be her own personal affairs, and even though Subaru and the others were completely unrelated to that,

Subaru: "It certainly is a nightmare to deal with."

Julius: "This is not the first time Emilia-sama's and your ideations have been brought up. It was out of line for us outsiders to utter such nonsensical things… Incidentally, who is this Mama of hers?"

Subaru: "We don't know. Any other thing besides this mother's name, Mama, is an unknown. Based on what Meili said, she doesn't even know what her face looks like. What kind of family environment is this?"

But, considering the professional killer business, perhaps that grim way of life was unavoidable. It seemed difficult to figure out who this mother was based off the content of Meili's statements, so they could shake off anxiety about the future.

Subaru: "That Roswaal bastard was also useless after Elsa died, since there was no one like an intermediary."

Julius: "Did you say something?"

Subaru: "Just talking to myself."

The Insignia incident that occurred on the very first day, the day Subaru had been summoned, in the Royal Capital, had been orchestrated by Roswaal. Of course, Elsa, who had attempted to reap Emilia's life, was also the one who he had commissioned to do so. Considering the flow of events of that request, it should have been easy to draw that conclusion.

However, the intermediary of that communication line had perished somehow, and it seemed that they were unable to contact the person. If Roswaal's words were anything to be trusted, Elsa and Meili's subsequent attack was unrelated to his intentions[7]—— This was where this Mother or whatever had become a concern.

[7] This is the correct translation of "その後のエルザとメィリィの襲撃は", but if you might recall, Elsa was indeed commissioned by Roswaal to act during Arc 4, while Meili was not. That is the big mystery here. This is a bit clearer in the Light Novel version of this scene.

Subaru: "Anyhow, that's our relationship with Meili. This girl's here out of necessity. It's not to spoil her, at least for now."

Meili: "Considering that, Subaru and everyone are being a little too nice."

Subaru: "In regards to that, it's our dreamy good virtues taking over!"

Because after all, it was painful seeing this small, youthful girl being confined to a cold basement. It was not something they could just decide to forget, and if they attempted tried to disregard it, they would end up getting bad dreams.

So, it's not like he had any grudge against her, and so he was better off being in a good mood with her.

Anastasia: "…Wouldn't'cha normally have a grudge against her?"

Subaru: "…Should I?"

Anastasia: "I mean, didn't'cha say that she tried to kill you? So…"

Subaru: "There's a thing such as idle malicious intent, although a crime is a crime regardless of age."

In response to Anastasia's question, Subaru went into thought while scratching his cheek. Once he took a peek at Meili to the side, Subaru noticed that she was looking at himself with unreadable emotions in her eyes.

He wasn't really concerned about her, but he spoke his thoughts honestly.

Subaru: "If someone orders a person who doesn't know any better to commit a crime, then the person who made the order should be blamed. Even more so if it's a kid. If they're capable of thinking for themselves and do it regardless, I think there's no difference. «An eye for an eye», I think the Hammurabi Code is nothing but negative."

Anastasia: "That's some lip service. Then do ya think the people this girl has murdered would agree with that that?"

Subaru: "I don't think so, they're free to want revenge on Meili. As for myself, had I died, even I don't think I'd state my forgiveness like I did now."

In the end, Subaru's opinions and thoughts would change depending on first impressions.

If he were told things such as that he wasn't right in the head, or that he was being ruled over by his emotions, then so be it. Actually, that was probably true.

Subaru: "Back when I was a kid, my parents and other adults would take responsibility for me. So, I thought that if the kids near me do something that they can't take responsibility for, how about I take them up instead? That's all."

Anastasia: "…A valuable opinion, thanks."

Anastasia cut off Subaru's words, as she had lost interest halfway.

Of course, he felt like that was a typical reaction, so his feelings hadn't been hurt. In an organization where clean judgement was not taken into consideration, then any crime would be judged to as a crime, regardless of age.

A grace period, however, was given because this camp a lenient one. Subaru didn't dislike that atmosphere and environment.

Julius: "I…"

Subaru: "——Hm?"

Julius: "I believe what Subaru is saying makes sense."

Subaru: "…Thanks."

He had not been expecting completely positive reactions, but words such as those were akin to salvation for him.

Then turning to Meili, who had been forgotten even though the conversation had her as the topic, Subaru matched his eyesight with hers.

Subaru: "I have something that I need your help with. Mind coming along with me?"

Meili: "…Okaay. I'll go with Onii-san."

Meili quietly nodded at Subaru's request.

Subaru, nor anyone else, pointed out how they felt like they could witness slight tears from the girl who had hidden her face with the panda in her embrace.

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Meili: "I've only been to the Augria Sand Dunes twice."

Subaru and the others' explanation ended, and Meili said those words while fiddling with her braided hair. She closed her eyes as if looking back at her memories before resuming,

Meili: "I visited to replenish the Witchbeasts in my control. There are lots of Witchbeasts there, so a lot of progress was made, but…"

Subaru: "But?"

Meili: "Onii-san, are you really going there? Everyone besides me will probably die, you know…?"

It seemed that their actions were seen as reckless, in the eyes of this girl who was devoid of morals. The Witchbeast Master's opinion carried quite some weight in regards to just how much they were striving for.

Subaru: "I really want to use the expertise of those with experience as a reference, but the idea that we'll die if we go's been thrown around a lot already, so it's a bit late for that. Also, if it's just like a maze in the desert, then we have preparations to break out of it."

Anastasia: "Yes, that'd be me."

Anastasia waved her hand, emphasizing her role as a guide.

However, avoiding getting lost on the path in this endeavor to conquer the desert to get to the Watchtower was only worth thirty points—— failure would be inevitable with this score. Or rather, as long as they remained unable to find an answer worth a perfect score, they would probably have difficulty getting out alive.

The three problems were the Desert Labyrinth, the Witchbeast Den, and the Sage's Eye".

The Desert Labyrinth would work out with Anastasia being Eridna, and as for the counter for the Witchbeast Den, this is what they wanted to prepare a measure for.

That was why he wished to hear more details from Meili, but——

Subaru: "How should I put it… Don't you know any way to avoid the Witchbeasts? Or on the contrary, ways to lure them away from us?"

Meili: "Onii-san, if you run on by yourself, a looot of them will definitely chase you, you know?"

Subaru: "I've already done that a few times and they were painful experiences."

It had happened once a year ago at the mansion, and once again a little after that by the Whale on the plain. He felt like it was about time to stop this.

Of course, he wasn't reluctant to do it if there was no other measure to take, but Subaru wanted to avoid being the only one left behind in the middle of the desert if possible.

Meili: "If onii-san doesn't want to do it, then maybe you could prepare a lot of decoys for it. All Witchbeasts jump at living things over normal food, so maybe something like that."

Emilia: "That's definitely a no! I'm against it! I am against it!"

Subaru: "You don't have to disagree so frantically. Nobody will be chosen, so it's fine."

That being said, it seemed like no useful opinions were coming up.

Or at least, as far as the Witchbeasts' ecology was concerned, with Meili, someone who was better at handling them than anyone else, incapable of coming up with an effective plan, they were helpless.

Subaru: "Yep, guess we'll have to beat the Witchbeasts that come at us one-by-one. Gonna expect a lot from Emilia-tan and Julius."

Julius: "I am wondering about your self-appraisal, considering how you were not included there… But do you think it's possible?"

Julius reacted to Subaru's proposal by asking Meili about its feasibility. Upon hearing that, Meili looked at Emilia and Julius in turn, and,

Meili: "Probably not. Can onee-san use magic for about a week without rest?"

Subaru: "You want us to have something like a final fight in a trench!?"

Emilia: "I-I'll try…?"

Subaru: "You don't have to! This is the flow of an unreasonable conversation! Emilia-tan's hair and skin will dry up, so let's not! Okay, rejected!"

It seemed like the plan to break through by force already had some unreasonable details to it.

Just how much of that scenario Meili had actually seen was unknown, but if there no such thing as childish exaggeration in her statements, then they could never perform the unreasonable.

Emilia: "How about smearing Witchbeast blood on the dragon carriage and fooling the other Witchbeasts' sense of smell?"

Subaru: "No, the ground dragons won't be able to fool them, and there's the possibility that the Witchbeasts won't band together. Something like hiring guards… How about hiring a big army for this, much like what was done for the White Whale?"

Julius: "That will not be possible either. That was done before by other people who challenged the Pleiades Watchtower. Even though it was not as big as an army, it was still a big group. Feel free to guess the result. How about breaking the horn of a powerful Witchbeast and use it to fend off other Witchbeasts?"

Subaru: "If it's not as overwhelming as the Whale, then we'll be overrun by their numbers. It 'd be nice if avoiding them were simple, such as using something like insect repellent spray."

Subaru's odor—— or rather, the Witch's Lingering Scent, was a spray that brought insects towards him, so he was useless.

Roswaal was the one responsible for constantly managing the barrier that separated Arlam Village from the Witchbeasts' habitat. Something like creating a barrier around people, one that moved together with them—— It seemed like that sort of thing was not possible.

Subaru: "Perhaps we should have Roswaal hold onto us, and attack from the sky."

Julius: "If we could slip by the Sage's Eye, then that may have been an option."

Subaru: "Ahh, damn, right. We have to consider the Sage too."

His unrealistic viewpoint was denied by a realistic one.

Even if they could evade the Witchbeasts and the desert, there was still the Sage to worry about. Just how had nobody ever been able to slip by this person, it was honestly the only thing they were completely in the dark on how to handle.

Subaru: "If we could at least narrow it down to one problem…"

Meili: "——Geeez, I guess I've got no choice."

Subaru: "Oh?"

Subaru and the others all sat in a circle in the room, getting headaches from thinking about the way out of this conundrum, and then, finally, Meili spoke. She stood up, shaking her small head at Subaru and the others.

Meili: "I can go with you guys. If I'm there, the Witchbeasts won't care what you do. You'll be free to keep away from them, make them pets, make them kill each other, or make them eat the Sage person."

Subaru: "We won't do the second half! Or anyways…"

He opened his eyes wide at that fairly extreme remark, but the proposal shocked him even more.

Not only was Meili being cooperative, but she was willing to go out on her own, an opinion he thought she would never express.

Subaru: "Aren't you scared to go outside? Is that alright?"

Meili: "It's not like I'll be found by Mama right after I leave the mansion, you know? I'm scared of being found, but I can't just stay in here my whole life."

He was surprised with Meili being conscious of the fact that, sooner or later, she would have to leave.

But, that may have been natural. He had been taking turns checking on her whenever the chance presented itself, but even then, the time that girl spent confined in her room by herself was multitudes larger. Certainly, she had had so much time to think, that the silence would become scary.

Being confined in a room, alone, was both relaxing and terrifying. And even if those sensations evoked lethargy in her, one day, her heart would be tortured suddenly.

Emilia: "Subaru…"

And while Subaru was feeling unusual sympathy for Meili's heart, Emilia gently pulled on his sleeve. Subaru knew what she was thinking, as he agreed with it as well.

Subaru: "This isn't just a fun walk outside. We have a guide, we'll be crossing the desert, and even though we have you, we'll have to get through the Witchbeast Den. To make matters worse, some scary Sage guy might be on the watchout too."

Meili: "Isn't it nice taking a walk after a while?"

With those bullish words, Meili replied to Subaru. Just how much of it was a bluff was unbeknownst to him, and likewise, just how much of it was her telling the truth was too, but——

Emilia: "She is the trump card for the Witchbeasts, right?"

Subaru: "Ahh, yeah that's right. We'll be counting on you, Meili."

Meili: "I'll try my best even if you don't."

Emilia and Subaru exchanged gazes with each other, and then nodded to Meili. The girl, the receptor of their words spoke as if she would push herself beyond her own utmost abilities, and hugged the panda tightly.

And so, this became a single step forward towards accomplishing their journey, at which Julius folded his arms, some words spilling from his, his face one of admiration at the result he had just witnessed.

Julius: "I really wish that I would not utter these words, but persuading little girls really is one of your strong points… Although, I do not believe that this is not a good ability to be renowned for."

Subaru: "It's because you guys are steadily treating me like a little girl user[8]! I'll have you know that Meili isn't as small as a little girl! She's not a little girl!"

Subaru pointed at the room's entrance in frustration in response to Julius's useless words. Right as he did however, the door was opened, and a person showed up on the other side of the door,

???: "——I was wondering what was so noisy, only to find out that it was just Subaru making a racket again, I suppose."

Having finished her private talk with Roswaal, yet another little girl had joined them. Another fuzz was made again, but that was an incident to be put aside as something not worth bringing up, so that will be left as that.

[8] Works better than Lolimancer here. Obviously, if you haven't caught it by now, the literal translation of Subaru's title is "Little Girl User" (幼女使い). Lolimancer is just too much of a community staple, and it sounds so nice too!

Arc 6 Chapter 4 – The Reason to Bring You Out

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 1 “A Reason to Bring You”, Parts 7-8

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

The conquering of the deathly Augria Sand Dunes in order to reach Pleiades Watchtower.

The Witchbeast Master, Meili, joined Subaru’s group as a member that would boost their confidence in escaping from the sandy labyrinth—— a maze in which laid a Witchbeast Den.

However, even though it had been settled that she would be brought along, this girl had been the sole resident of the mansion’s Confinement Room for a long period, one year to be exact, because she had assisted Roswaal. She had an history of cooperating with the Bowel Hunter in attacking the mansion, and naturally, Subaru had thought that arguments about releasing Meili from her solitary confinement would be natural, but——

Roswaal: “There’s nooothing~ wrong with it, is there? If Emilia-sama and Subaru-kun have decided to let you out, then there shouldn’t be any problem with that? Even if their judgement turns out to be inaccurate and she indeed has bad intentions, you guys are the ones that she’d aim for, youuu~ know.”

Roswaal readily gave Meili permission to leave. The contents of his reply were truly Roswaal-ish, but what mattered was that she had gained his permission for the moment anyway.

And thus, Meili was finally allowed out of her year-long confinement.

Meili: “Mmmmm~! Just as I thought, the atmosphere outside is sooo different. Being in that cramped room for soooo long made it hard for me to breathe.”

Subaru: “But still, we tried doing a lot of different things to make you feel otherwise, huh. It wasn’t as bad as you say it was, you know?”

Meili: “Reaaaally? I welcome the concern, but being able to freely move your body is a whooole different feeling. Onii-san, if you don’t learn to appreciate the small things, you’ll be hated by onee-san and ojou-chan long before you know it, you knooow.”

Meili’s lips aligned in a pout while holding her plethora of stuffed animals.

Incidentally, the person Meili was referring to as “onee-san” was Emilia, while the person she was referring to as “ojou-chan” was Beatrice. She would refer to Petra as “Petra-chan”, Garfiel as “fanged onii-san”, and thus she’d reasonably refer to Otto as “weakling”.

Meili: “Can I rest in this room?”

Subaru: “From what I’ve been told, there shouldn’t be a problem. Someone came in to clean this place, despite it being a room that isn’t used very often, so you shouldn’t feel uneasy about it being dirty or anything like that. Frederica should have come to clean the room right around the time we were bringing our luggage out as well, so.”

Meili: “…Okay.”

Within the western wing of Roswaal’s mansion were many private rooms for servants—— The inside of one of them, was currently being inspected by a curious Meili.

Meili had been freed from the Confinement Room. However, her position remained complex. Naturally, expelling her was out of question, as she needed to be taken care of at the mansion. But what exactly was her role? Was she a guest? Was she a maid? She couldn’t be pushed away to the point of calling her a guest, but she wasn’t as close as to be labelled a maid.

Thus, they had settled on branding her a cooperative worker of the mansion, as it would have been insufficient to call her a maid, and it would have been insufficient to call her a guest, and was assigned a room on the servant’s floor.

Her belongings, that were kept in the Confinement Room, would be brought over, making it seem as if this bland room had been dyed with colors of her choice.

Meili: “Even if I’ve been freed, I don’t know how long I’ll be staying here, you know. Once something that seems like an opportunity to live peacefully appears, I might immediately run away, after all.”

Subaru: “Well, what’s most important is that you don’t cause trouble nor go back to that Mama of yours. You can do whatever you want other than that. Oh, but, I’ll make sure you carry out this duty properly. After that, then you can do whatever you want.”

Meili: “You’re saying that, when i-i-i-it’s all taken care of, I can die wherever I want?”

Subaru: “I have to even hear about stuff like that? Why would I care about where someone dies…? That’s what the cynical, pretentious me of the past would say, but I won’t say stuff like that now.”

After Subaru had set down all her belongings into the room, he petted Meili’s head as she stood still at the window. This girl with braided, chestnut hair twinkled her eyes as Subaru continued to pet her head.

Subaru: “I want the gang to live decently, and die decently, no matter what. You’re free to leave if you want it, but at least send us back a letter or something. Just enjoy this time as genuinely as you can.”

He gave a light pat to her head at the end of his statement, then brought his hand back. After receiving that tap to her head, Meili glared at Subaru with scornful eyes, putting her own hand where Subaru’s had been.

Meili: “…Onii-san, did you win over ojou-chan and Petra-chan like that? Jeeez, even being in constant caution of you isn’t enough.”

Subaru: “That aaactually wasn’t my intention, you know.”

Scratching his head, Subaru then finished helping Meili bring her personal belongings in and headed towards the room’s exit. He did not have any intention of helping with the rearrangement of the room upon completing the task of bringing in her stuff. On top of that, there probably was a helpless wall separating Subaru’s sense of remodeling and Meili’s own.

Thus, he decided it would be best to depart before doing anything unnecessary that would cause her to dislike him.

Meili: “Well, I’ll take your words with a grain of salt. Besides, you’re going to be throwing your life away soon at the Augria Sand Dunes anyway.”

Subaru: “We aren’t going to throw away our lives; we’re going to assemble our lives. And that’s where we’ll be heavily relying on your powers, so we’ll be counting on you.”

Meili: “Okay, okay.”

Swinging his hand back and forth to the girl who was blowing him off so that he would leave, Subaru went out the room. She brought out each of her belongings out from a box, all while wearing an indifferent face as she avoided looking at Subaru, and her possessions were displayed in a first, tentative manner.

Just like Meili had said, this was a room that made her feel like she didn’t know how long she would be staying, nor that she knew if she’d return.

Meili: “I’m having fun, ahhh.”

This girl indulged herself in her own room, as she walked around with a gait that exemplified unrestrained enthusiasm. And as she went around arranging her favorite stuffed animals, the happiness of the young girl, having obtained her own room for the first time, was plain for all to see—— it would make anyone feel pleased, to see such a spring in the step of a young girl.

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With the decision of adding Meili to the group, the participants in the Exciting Tour to Inquiry the Sage would include this group of seven—— Subaru, Emilia and Beatrice, as members of the same organization, and Julius, Anastasia, and Meili, as outsiders-made-collaborators. And, another girl would be taken out. Rem.

The aforementioned were the seven members of the party who would face the Augria Sand Dunes located at the eastern end of the world.

The Augria Sand Dunes, a place located at the edge of the world, laid in a straight line east of the new Roswaal mansion—— but, as the path they would travel was longer than the one leading to the Watergate City of Pristella, it would take close to twenty days for just a one-way trip.

In other words, just the roundtrip journey would take a total of forty days. They would safely arrive at the Watchtower, and considering they would be staying there for a couple of days, the length of this large expedition could very well turn into something close to two months instead. The problem with this was——

Subaru: "Heyy, Petra. Sorry for leaving you alone, but let me at least brighten your mood."

Petra: "Don't worry~. I'm not angry, it's fine. Subaru-sama can go to as many faraway, dangerous places as he wants, just like he always has, right?"

Petra was yielding to the harsh depression that resulted from having to stay behind during the Pristella affairs for a whole month, which would soon become a period of two months.

This girl walked impetuously around the mansion with a cold, clear face, as she waved around her maid outfit, an outfit that was befitting for her petite body. As for Subaru, he was following her back, showering her in apologies, in the midst of trying his best to repair her humor.

Anyways, why was it even necessary for Subaru to be this frantic in fixing Petra's mood? Well, the common assumption was that, in all times and all places, whenever a girl became displeased in such a manner, it was usually the guy's fault.

In reality, Petra was the girl with the most prominent girl power in the mansion. She would proudly display this girl power as the representative for the girls. In this mansion, the only possible unfortunate men that could have possibly harmed her mood were Subaru, Roswaal, Garfiel, Otto—— Wait a second, isn't that a lot of people? And wait… Weren't all guys unfortunate when it came to power? Once he was revived, Puck would probably join the ranks of these bad boys. It was beyond pathetic. But anyways——

Subaru: "I know that leaving you behind with Ros-chi at the mansion for a month would stress you so much to the point it'd be hard for you to breathe, but if just reason that it's just part of your job and can't be pick ab… Guh!"

Petra: "I don't get mad over things like that! I'm not a kid! Stop saying weird things like that when I have Ram-neesama and Frederica-neesama."

Subaru: "To think a girl who headbutts the pit of a man's stomach would claim she's not a child is just…"

Petra, having caused Subaru to collapse in agony with a strike to a vital part of his body. truly resembled anger.

She stuck a prideful pose as she held her waist with both of her hands, and she stuck out her chest to insistently convince him that her appearance was indicative of anything but a kid. However, a lady's essence was something that would be reached before her body. As for Beatrice, her body's growth rate would not catch up at all, so it felt like her attitude was being dragged along as well, but…

Subaru: "But Petra, wasn't this headbutt from a higher place than your previous one? Well even then, it felt like there was a small moment at the start of your previous headbutt where you were on your tiptoes before you came flying towards my chest."

Petra: "…I'm dumbfounded. Didn't I tell Beatrice? Hey, look! I've grown up in this past month, my back has grown, my legs have grown, and hasn't my face become cute as well?"

Subaru: "Ah, I guess you did grow a bit? Your back and your hair I mean. Although, your face was cute from the beginning."

Originally, Petra was the beauty of the Arlam Village. Having been lured away by the mansion to serve as one of its maids had caused a great fuss, as Petra, being the village's boys' dream girl, was the one girl everyone wanted to marry.

To be more specific, you could cause a sumo wrestling tournament to unfold in the center of the plaza if you challenged these crybabies. The adults would barge in at the end, and the celebration of lifting the somehow beaten-up Subaru into the air would reach its end. It would be an enigmatic rite of passage.

Anyhow, Petra was this girl who was loved by the villagers. She was a girl who often expressed her sorrow about helping with the mansion. He wanted to use the convenience of having her in the mansion as much as possible, for the sake of the extraordinary future potential Petra had in store. That being said, at the same time, Subaru held no power within the mansion, so he would cherish these days to an extent so that he'd continue on without forgetting this type of ordinary life, although——

Subaru: "Also, you weren't able to be the extremely playful girl that you are. As for neesama and her well-known temper… I am aware of how you feel suffocated from having her tell you to work all the time."

Petra: “It’s not like that, though…”

Subaru let both of his arms open to console the pouting girl. Petra showed a slightly hesitant gesture, and then she jumped into Subaru’s arms. He hugged her small body, and then petted her head as to reward her.

Petra: “Subaru… I mean, Subaru-sama, you’re going to do something dangerous again?”

Subaru: “It’s not as if it’s completely settled that it’s going to be dangerous, you know? Actually, it kinda sounds like I’m saying you shouldn’t consider the possibility of it being dangerous, but the truth is, it really might be a reasonably safe expedition.”

Petra: “What’s the probability of each outcome?”

Subaru: “I guess it would be a ratio of eight-to-two, with the safe outcome being the lowest, maybe?”

Petra: “To me, that sounds like it’d be pretty dangerous then.”

Not being able to lie in a meaningful conversation was one of Subaru’s bad habits.

Subaru felt like Petra had begun to becoming displeased while being held in his arms. He then he let out a sigh, as he did not understand what was wrong with her. Suddenly, Petra started to rub her forehead against his stomach.

Petra: “I’m worried. Subaru-sama is always like this, ever since you first came to the mansion, and ever since I met you at the village. You’ve been through so much, and going all over the place diligently, without even taking a break… It would be nice if you would learn a thing or two from my lazy Master[9].”

Subaru: “Nah. Even though Roswaal gave his stamp of approval, he probably has some sweat rolling down his forehead whenever we’re somewhere he can’t see. I agree that he’s useless when it comes to life-threatening matters, though.”

Petra: “It was rough with the Witchbeasts, it was rough with the Witch Cult, it was rough with the Earth Spider, it was rough with the Goddess Statue, it was rough at the Great Forest of Elior, and it was rough

[9] Translation note by Remonwater: “Petra actually refers to Roswaal as «danna-sama» (旦那様), which means «master (of the mansion)», but «master-sama» sounds redundant so I’ve decided to omit the «sama» honorific.”

cleaning the graves too[10]. Despite all that, you still fought with the witch cult at Pristella, and then Otto and the others died… Well, almost."

Subaru: "Otto nearly died us back then."

Otto dies too much.

Amazingly enough, Subaru was in complete agreement with this notion, but he wished that he wouldn't simply die. If Otto died, Subaru would not be able to avoid dying himself as well.

Not to boast of it as a friendship that not even death would tear apart, though.

Petra: "Why can't someone other than Subaru-sama do it? Someone, another person… You should just leave it up to someone stronger or something like that, like Master, since he has the time."

Subaru: "I… I understand. I understand just how much frustration you've had piled up because of how Roswaal wastes his time so often. Stop trying to drive Roswaal off to his death every time you can. There's way too much friction in this camp."

It wouldn't be a problem if it were just things like Roswaal not noticing how Petra would put squeeze juice out of her cleaning cloth into his tea. However, it would obviously be bad if she started showing her hostility and malice in clearer terms.

Before it turned out like that however, Subaru let out a commanding voice, but Petra eyed Subaru with a serious look. It seemed like half-assed deception and insincere words would not be able to convince her. Also, above all, Petra was seriously worried about Subaru's safety.

Saying anything unnecessary and careless in this situation would be disrespectful to Petra's feelings of anxiety.

Subaru: "Well, I get your point. I really do. It's true that there seem to be Witchbeasts on the way to the Sage's tower, it's true that the desert's maze is rumored to be ridiculous. And I know how ridiculous it

[10] The Earth Spider and Goddess Statue bits refer to the "The Three Idiots Set Out! Earth Spider Episode" and "The Three Idiots Set Out! Cursed Goddess Statue Episode" side stories that took place between Arcs 4 and 5. The former was briefly referenced in Arc 5 Chapter 29, and has a summary-translation here. The latter is not translated in any way.

is in the first place to aim for a Sage that'd get mad at us for coming close to the tower… But even then, there's no way in hell I'd leave this up to someone else."

Petra: "…Why? Subaru-sama, aren't you perhaps overestimating your own strength? Just let Garf-san make an embarrassing assumption like that."

Subaru: "Petra's grading is seriously strict to the extreme! There's no way in hell I'm going to let Garfiel hear that!"

Petra's critical standards were so harsh that it would make many men tremble upon hearing them.

It would be appropriate to characterize Garfiel's attitude towards his weakness as one of making false expectations while being unfazed. However, Garfiel made sure to put in earnest efforts to change these false expectations into reality. Also, in this case, the problem was probably the fact that he would be stronger when holding these erroneous beliefs.

The matter at hand thus could not be heard by Garfiel, considering his interpretation of his strength and his actual strength.

Subaru: "Well, putting aside Garfiel's impression and his way of thinking… It's not like I… It's not like I think there's no one out more suitable for the task. And first of all, leaving everything up to Reinhard would be safer in all kinds of ways as a preparation to escape the sand maze."

Petra: "Then why don't you let him do it?"

Subaru: "I wonder why. Despite being someone who's fond of being pampered, I thought I was someone that didn't yearn for honor."

In actuality, he really did not understand why he desired to do it like this. However, if he were to dare and put it in words, perhaps these would be how to best put it?

Subaru: "——No, never mind, this is something I want to do myself, after all. Even if there's someone more suited for it out there, even though I know there'd be a higher chance of success that way, I still want to do it."

Petra: "Why?"

Subaru: “It’s embarrassing but… It’s because I want me to be the first person she sees when she wakes up.”

Petra: “————”

He did not specify who. But even so, Petra understood who it was.

If a way to wake up that girl—— the girl that laid in a state of continuous deep slumber, were to be found at the Sage’s tower, he wanted to be the one to seize it.

Even if there was someone else out there more suitable for the endeavor, even if someone other than himself with a higher chance of success existed, this was the sole thing he would not give up. He did not want to give it up. This was Subaru’s ego.

Subaru: “If I were to disregard my feelings and think of it from a rational viewpoint… Anyone could be the one to wake her up. If something like a ridiculous disease of never being able to wake up were to spread, and were this only about saving them, I wouldn’t care about anyone else developing a vaccine or a wonder drug to cure it. I wouldn’t care about the process, if it meant saving them.”

Petra: “…Yeah.”

Subaru: “But if I allow my feelings to come into the picture, I want to do things myself. I want to be the one to help them. I want to be the one to wake them up. I want to give it my all and save everything.”

——Thus, Natsuki Subaru would be the one to go.

There were countless others who were stronger.

There were countless others who were more reliable.

There were countless others who were wiser.

There were countless others of class who were more wonderful.

But Natsuki Subaru’s own ego would ignore all of that, and so, he would be the one to go. Only because he wanted to be praised by this girl after saving her.

Subaru: “Sorry for disappointing you with my selfishness.”

Petra: “——You really did disappoint me. Nothing you said changes anything for me.”

Subaru: “Hmm?”

After Subaru’s own acknowledge of hiss shamefulness, Subaru petted Petra’s head, bracing himself for her hatred. But after Petra let out an unclear voice, she lifted her head from Subaru’s arms.

Subaru was surprised that her round, large eye had become clouded by giant teardrops. And then—

Petra: “Ey!”

Subaru: “Another headbutt—-!?”

Petra swung her pointy head downward, and then her forehead caused great pain to the pit of Subaru’s stomach.

She had aimed at Subaru’s defenseless vitals, making him fall to his knees, promptly escaping from his arms with an anticlimactic leap, then closing one of her eyes and sticking out her tongue.

Petra: “Subaru-sama, you idiot! You’re selfish! Why don’t you just go do whatever you want!?”

Subaru: “Guh, oh…”

Petra: “Because when you return after two months, I’ll surprise you by becoming a really beautiful girl. Feel free to regret not being able to see that growth up close!”

Subaru: “Mhm, there’s really something unfortunate about that.”

It would not be unusual for a kid to change during their growth period so suddenly. Petra was a glamorous thirteen-year-old after all, so after two months she might give out a completely different impression.

Subaru: “To tell you the truth, I also grew nineteen centimeters between the seventh and eighth grades…”

Petra: “Huh? That seems a little impossible…”

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by Setowi (source)

Well, Subaru's case was rare; he had only grown so much because he was originally short. Although Petra almost broke down due to the size of the expectations he had of her, this girl clenched her fists soon after.

And then, thrusting both of her fists towards Subaru, she declared.

Petra: "Anyways! What Subaru-sama should do is to go ahead and travel to whatever dangerous places he wishes. worrying everyone and troubling everyone, and after that, come back like you always do."

Subaru: "It sounds like I'm a pretty big nuisance to others when you say that…"

Although, looking at it that way, the way she had described him surprisingly did not sound far from the truth. Anyhow, Subaru pushed out both of his hands as well, and then matched Petra's fists with his own.

Subaru: "It's always troubling for Petra, but I'll carelessly head towards dangerous places like I always do, and you just wait for me to return after all those things are done and dusted like you always do. It's Petra's own special right to welcome us back once we return from our journey."

Petra: "…You won't let Frederica-neesama or Ram-neesama say it before me, right?"

Subaru: "Yeah. I promise."

Petra: "Including Master?"

Subaru: "Don't worry about that, if Roswaal is the first one to appear after we come back, I'll smack him."

Petra: "…Mhm, I understand. Alright, that convinces me."

She pulled back the fists that were matched with Subaru's, and then that triumphant spirit started to flow out of the sighing Petra. Largely because he had let Petra take over the flow of the conversation, though.

Petra: "Jeez, Subaru-sama can't be helped…"

Somehow, it felt like her statement had been delivered in a way that made it seem as if she were talking to everyone. Subaru thought that he couldn't wrap his head around that.

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Although he was not worried to the point of anxiety, in order to settle an uncertain matter that lied within the mansion, Subaru finally stepped inside that room.

Subaru: "————"

Entering this room was the only time Subaru would naturally hold his breath and lighten his footsteps. But even if he were to enter the room while singing loudly and tapping his feet, the situation within the room definitely would not change.

Still, perhaps he unconsciously decided to keep silent within the room simply for the sake of the girl who was laying on the bed within the room, whose figure would cause pain to swell up within his chest if he were to look at it excessively.

It was a deep sleep. If she were able to wake up, he would wish for her to wake up right this instant.

However, he felt that disturbing her deep sleep would be akin to blasphemy. This girl, who had sunken into a deep sleep of everlasting dreams, was precious to him to such degree.

Subaru: "I say that but, that of course is just my own overly subjective belief, huh…"

Saying those words with a tone of dismay, Subaru pulled out a chair aside the bed to sit on. Just like that, one month had passed since he last stepped foot into this room, and he reunited with the face of a sleeping Rem, whose state showed no change, still in a state of deep slumber—— ever since a year ago.

Subaru: "I'm back, but I'm sorry for coming to see you so late. I had some business to take care of… and on top of that I showed a bit of hesitation, making this visit very last-minute."

Rem: "————"

It was obvious but, of course, there was no response from the sleeping Rem. Subaru reached out with his voice, despite knowing that there would be no response, and held a calm expression even then. Natsuki Subaru had an expression that he would expose only to this specific girl.

He owned this determined expression, indicating he was ready to throw away his own life in earnest, that he would only show to Emilia.

He owned this trustful expression, that made it seem as if he would be able to entrust his life, that he would only show to Beatrice.

And then he owned this expression that exposed his weaknesses which he so often tried to conceal, the expression that he would only show to Rem.

Subaru: “What should I tell you… Actually, there’s so many things I can talk to you about, you know? While I couldn’t come here, I was at the Watergate City of Pristella, and a lot of things happened there. It was such a big uproar that, even if I talked to you about it all night, there’d still be more to tell you about… But even then, I have plenty of time in the world to talk to you about all that.”

Subaru gently slipped his hand within the bed, searching for the hand of the girl who had a towel blanket up to her chest, and began speaking upon grasping Rem’s hand.

Within her long fingertips, with her slender, pale arms, her gentleness and existence of her warmth were evident, but for some reason there was the mysterious sense of bloodflow—— No, a sign of life within her was missing.

A lone force within her was preserving her life. However, there was no force within her that simultaneously preserved her life and made it whole.

Rem’s life, with this contradictory situation, had her time frozen even now, trapped within a state of deep slumber. However——

Subaru: “I might finally reach you.”

Rem: “————”

Subaru: “Of course, it’s also possible that my expectations are too high and I’ll end up not being satisfied. Of course, it’s also possible that, in the end, the Sage will fail to live up to their name and end up with nothing, only to have them apologize for the inaccurate information.”

Rem: “————”

Subaru: “But.”

A clear path to a solution, other than defeating Gluttony, finally was coming into sight.

Although the fact that the path he had followed to reach this answer had been shaped by others was a source of disappointment, even so, it resembled a ray of light, one that seemed like he was finally able to grasp——

Subaru: “Because I was too busy freaking out to ask Echidna.”

Within the Sanctuary, within the Witch’s Tomb, back when he had been invited to a Tea Party in a dream, he confronted Echidna, the Witch of Greed, and in rejecting her, Subaru escaped her control. It was a choice taken to protect Natsuki Subaru’s fragile soul, but at the same time, it was a decision that distanced himself from the one person who might have assisted him in finding a way to save Rem (possibly).

Of course, it was hard to gauge just how much insight Echidna, a Witch most knowledgeable of the past, could lend about an Archbishop brandishing their power in the present. But maybe, had he revealed the situation to her, listening to the Witch’s input might have been helpful.

Right after determinedly rejecting the Witch’s request, he had been confident that the right decision had been made. But as time went on, he became aware that it felt that the passing seasons and the relationships’ development were leaving Rem behind, he became worried about whether his decision was the correct one after all.

Even if he had promised from the bottom of his heart that he would save her, he himself had yet to take any definite action for that end. But finally, he was now able to do something for her sake, having slipped out of the deadlock that had stagnated every time.

In the city of Pristella, a multitude of people had suffered the same type of fate as Rem—— and for the purpose of saving them, they would embark on a journey to the Pleiades Watchtower. However, if he were to point out his real motive, the real reason that drove Subaru towards the Watchtower was of Rem.

Even while understanding that it was both unreasonable and inappropriate, Subaru——

Subaru: “I will save you, Rem. That is the oath I made.”

Just like she had been there for Subaru in those fragile days, in those times. Now, in these times where Rem needed someone’s hand the most, was when Subaru wanted to be the one there for her and offer his hand.

???: “——Hurts.”

Subaru: “——!?”

Subaru, who had his eyes closed tight while speaking words of determination, heard a voice which made him raise his face abruptly.

He took a look at Rem with inconceivable surprise within his eyes, only to find that she was laying there, quietly, her eyes closed, holding onto Subaru’s hand in silence. Then whose voice was——

???: “Let go of her hand, Barusu. Just looking at how strongly you are holding her hand brings me pain.”

Subaru: “…Oh, it’s Ram.”

Looking back at the entrance of the room, Subaru saw Ram standing there, her cold look shooting daggers at him. After being relieved by her gaze, Subaru hurriedly released his hand—— the one that had been holding to Rem’s own, having realized that he had been grasping it with more strength than he thought.

Ram: “I cannot bear watching Rem’s whitebait-like fingers[11] being violated by Barusu’s sexual desires.”

Subaru: “Can you not say it like that? That’ll make me feel like my previous determination has turned into something completely loathsome.”

After Subaru let go of Rem’s hand, Ram, who had stepped into the room, took her hand instead. The older sister gently caressed the slender, white fingers of her younger sister, then regarding Subaru with a side glance.

[11] A term used to refer to immature, young fish, which span between one to two inches. They are regarded as a delicacy.

Ram: “Was your determination really that pure? Carefully reflect on yourself a bit more and make your speech again… If you lust after me instead, someone who looks extremely similar to Rem, Ram will also get down shivers up her spine and run away.”

Subaru: “Calm down. Even though your physical appearances are extremely alike, I will never confuse you two because of the differences in your inner selves’ radiance. I am not a half-hearted man who judges only the outside.”

Ram: “Is that so? I guess that is fine, then. Even if you have found a way to wake her up, it is hard to imagine how Rem would feel if Barusu had forgotten her during this year. It would be surprising if she does not hold any detest for you, if your depictions of her during our idle conversations were not just wild fantasies, that is.”

Subaru: “Just how little faith do you have in me… We’ve known each other for a long time now, you know?”

Ram: “Haa.”

Snorting with her nose like she always did, Ram’s movements indicated that she was about to leave her seat. Along with getting up from her seat, she looked around the room and then,

Ram: “I need to get ready to leave so, someone also needs to prepare a second set of clothes for Rem. She doesn’t sweat, so changing her clothes really is unnecessary but… her body still requires being wiped off.”

Subaru: “————”

Ram: “Something’s widening below your nose, disgusting.”

Subaru: “I didn’t say anything because there wasn’t really anything to say but, even when I don’t say anything this is the treatment I get!?”

Taking care of Rem’s body—— Rem, fallen in slumber due to having both her Name and Memories eaten, was basically unreactive to any physical stimulus. There was no real practical reason for doing things like wiping her body and changing her clothes.

The reason of those around her for doing such things was no more than to simply feel some comfort occasionally, that her existence was not being left behind.

Subaru: "————"

Only considering the practical aspects of doing all this, actions like Subaru making a speech and Ram taking care of her younger sister's body, neither did anything positive for the situation.

Yet, despite that, the reason why neither attempted to stop such pointless actions, was because everyone realized that even if they did not say it out loud, they knew that people still acknowledged the fact their actions would not be accompanied by actual consequences.

Subaru: "Isn't about time for you to start feeling as if Rem is your real sister?"

Ram: "————"

Subaru asked this question unexpectedly to her as she was looking down at the figure of a sleeping Rem, lending her own hand, with a gentleness that did not befit the girl named Ram.

Even though Ram bravely took care of Rem, no memories of this girl who represented her other half remained within her. The girl was so similar to Ram, it was impossible for anyone to claim that they were unrelated. But if one were to solely consider Ram's true feelings, Ram's relationship with Rem was a weak one.

Still, days like these passed by for a whole year. Even though she had lost her memories, it was possible for new, different ones to form. Perhaps, right now, definite memories were taking form within Ram.

Ram: "Earnest feelings such as those do not sprout that easily. No memories of her remain in me and I have never witnessed this girl in an awake state. Although I could imagine that she was probably someone of excellence and dignity, similar to Ram."

Subaru: "Sure she was excellent, but I don't really have any memory of her being that dignified. Rather, I've had my fair share of worries because she would be in such a hurry to the point of being reckless."

She did blow away half his body, well, there were circumstances.

Ram responded to Subaru with an "I see", her voice listless, similar to the wind.

Ram: “Speaking of memories that I do not remember, even if just for amusement, is nothing more than moving backwards. It is something Ram is not very fond of, Barusu.”

Subaru: “Is that so? If you say so, then I’ll stop.”

Ram: “…After she wakes up, if I regain my memories of her then, we can talk about plenty of things. But even if they are not restored, as long as she wakes up, then you may talk as much as you wish.”

Peeping into the face of her younger sister, Ram played with her bangs with an unchanging expression. Rem’s hair freely drifted down from above her pale forehead, Ram let out a small sigh.

Her profile looked cruel, yet gentle, to Subaru.

Even if she remembered nothing, even if memories of her had been lost, it was not as if their bond had disappeared. And even if it had indeed vanished, that did not that they could not be forged anew. Those were his thoughts.

Subaru: “Well, leave all that to me. I’ll conquer the Sage’s watchtower and then definitely make Rem wake up. And then you two sisters will have your emotional reunion.”

Thus, Subaru said these words in an excessively bright manner, with a deliberately loud voice. If anything, this moment between Subaru and Ram did not befit the quiet atmosphere within the room.

However, Ram looked back at him after his remarks with an extremely confused look.

Ram: “What are you saying, Barusu?”

Subaru: “Huh?”

After that, Ram looked at Subaru with a look like that of looking at an idiot.

Ram: “Ram will also accompany you on this next journey, so putting it that way is pretty condescending. If it is going to be an emotional reunion, Ram will be having it herself.”

Subaru: “That’s news that I haven’t heard before, you know!”

In response to Subaru widening his eyes in surprise, Ram looked at Subaru with a look even more full of spite.

However that gaze was unreasonable, for he could not know what he had not been told about, and he could not be aware of things that he had not heard about.

Ram: "————"

In response to Subaru asking what she was talking about, Ram held a manner of blocking her ears from his words, rejecting him.

And after that, this day of preparation would go by, and the two would not be able to have a straightforward conversation.

——Ram and Rem, the sisters, had been confirmed to accompany them.

A journey to the Pleiades Watchtower, to meet the Sage, Shaula.

That was the type of situation that seemed to lie ahead, for a total of eight participants, a large group.

Arc 6 Chapter 5 - To Each Their Unease

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 1 “A Reason to Bring You”, Part 9

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

Various discussions were had, along with some confusion when taking a decision on the travelers; many problems arose when bidding the people left behind farewell, but still, the morning of their departure had finally arrived.

Subaru: “It turned out to be a bigger group than I thought, but…”

Folding his arms, Subaru gazed at the people who would travel alongside him in the “Tour to Conquer the Sage’s Tower”.

The two camps to participate were the Emilia Camp and Anastasia Camp. The Emilia Camp was represented by, of course, Subaru, Emilia, and Beatrice, along with Rem, the perpetual sleeper, and Ram, who accompanied her. There was Anastasia, the guide for the Augria Sand Dunes, and her Knight, Julius. Including Meili, who was brought along as the Witchbeast Master so they could pass by the hordes of Witchbeasts that lived in the dunes, that made up for a total of eight people.

If their aim was to have a simple plan for their movement, then they had a lot of the people involved in reclaiming Pristella, and in regards to commanding people, Subaru had experience with the subjugation of the White Whale, as well as the battle against Sloth.

However, when it came to moving towards that faraway land—— these eight key people, despite being a large number of people on the road, no experience.

Subaru: “Wonder if it’ll actually be fine…”

???: “Worried about something, Subaru?”

He twisted his neck while imagining the distant future, and saw Emilia pop up in his vision. Subaru cleared his throat with a “Ahem”, directed at the girl wearing a lightweight dress for traveling afar and spoke,

Subaru: “When I think about the place we’re going to, I can’t stop being nervous. Other than that… I feel afraid about going to a dangerous place with such a large group, since it’s hard to protect so many people.”

Emilia: “You may be right. Rem and Ram are coming along too. Subaru will have to be protected by Meili and Anastasia.”

Subaru: “What the!? I’m already being treated as a non-combatant!?”

Emilia: “Come on, Subaru. Obviously it’s just a joke. You’re being taken seriously, after all.”

When Subaru suddenly screeched at Emilia, whose fists were balled up, she began laughing, being unable to contain it. Subaru too laughed after that reaction, but the stiffness of his slight smile was forgiving of her joke.

To tell the truth, Subaru’s combat ability was overwhelmingly inferior to Emilia’s. From Emilia’s point of view, Subaru was the one who should be protected— Of course, she didn’t mean to think of him only as that.

Subaru: “The next specific thing to feel uneasy about would be…”

When Subaru took a breather from his conversation with Emilia, he turned his attention towards the front.

They were already at the Roswaal residence’s front garden, and the preparations to depart were going swimmingly. Beyond Subaru’s line of sight, was a passenger carriage, large enough to carry ten people or thereabouts. The heads of two ground dragons were connected, for the purpose of pulling the dragon carriage. Both were races that were adequate to travel long distances.

The problem would be the situation next to the dragon carriage. There, was a jet-black ground dragon, casually standing still, and a small silhouette that had come face-to-face with the ground dragon’s snout, the latter glaring at the former.

Exhaling a stunned sigh at the situation, Subaru cut in between the two staring at each other.

Subaru: “You’ve been exaggerated as a Witchbeast user, but you can’t even get along with ground dragons?”

Meili: “Come on, onii-san. Can you not misunderstand me? The only animals I can discipline are ones that are bad and have horns. Any other animal won’t like me, as I smell like those children.”

Subaru: “So that’s how it is… Isn’t it rough like that?”

Subaru shrugged his shoulders at Meili’s explanation, and stroked Patrasche’s snout, still glaring at the girl. When Subaru touched this very prideful female ground dragon, it took a blunt sniff of his hand’s stink.

It was as if she was doing this to override the stink of the girl in front of her with Subaru’s own stench.

Subaru: “It’s really unusual to see Patrasche be this blunt, as someone tolerant and good at being considerate… Seems like you’re really incompatible.”

Meili: “I can be kinda friendly with other animals, but that ground dragon is too attached to onii-san. She’s so attached that it feels like if I let my guard down, I will get bitten. Onii-san, if you don’t discipline her properly, I’ll become that animal’s food, so be careful.”

Subaru: “Don’t say such scary things like it’s nothing… Here, Patrasche, go with her.”

Calming down the slightly agitated but very loving dragon, Subaru quickly put Meili on the dragon carriage. Furthermore, this Witchbeast Master, who would travel along, had little luggage. She was a girl who rarely carried any belongings to start with. But even then, she had brought the stuffed panda Subaru had crafted. The childish charm she had was indeed lovely.

???: “Looks like you’re havin’ trouble Natsuki-kun, always tryin’ to put girls in a good mood.”

Subaru: “…If you think so, then it’d make me happy if you didn’t bother me.”

As Meili was pushed onto the dragon carriage, Anastasia called out to him with a teasing tone. Anastasia—— However, inside was the white fox, Echidna.

In the twenty days from Pristella to the mansion, most of the differences had been smoothed out. If she resumed playing the role of Anastasia, it seemed like it would eventually become hard to tell them apart.

Anastasia: “I’d appreciate it if ya wouldn’t doubt me like that. Didn’t I tell ya that I’ve got no motivation to do it? That’s why I’ve volunteered to be ya guys’ guide for a dangerous path.”

Subaru: “That bit too, considering your creator, my stance’s that there’s a possibility of you having various plans. I’ve said this many times too, so remember it. It’s not like I don’t want to believe you. It would make me feel a lot more at ease if I could believe you.”

Anastasia: “It is not amusing, being at such a disadvantage because of someone I do not recall. It seems like this creator, of whom I have no recollection, has quite displeased you.”

Subaru: “————”

Anastasia: “Don’t get so mad at me. Geez, how frightenin’.”

When he glared at Eridna, she went back to disguising herself as Anastasia and pursed her lips, returning to her original state. With that, she passed by Subaru and stepped into the dragon carriage. After that, the number of people was——

???: “Subaru-kun, can I speak to yooou~ for a bit as weeell~?”

Having been beckoned verbally, he turned around, witnessing Roswaal at the mansion’s entranceway.

Next to the Margrave dressed in a clown outfit, were two people, Emilia and Julius. Thinking about the oddness of the combination, Roswaal turned to the three people as he closed one eye.

Roswaal: “First off, I imagine that this journey will take almost two months. Because of that, I’m thinking that there might be some unforeseen situations along midway. Emilia-sama and Anastasia-sama surely shall be able to deal with each of the problems that arise, buuuut~…”

Emilia: “Mhm, you can count on me. It’s not like I sat around being idle either, after all.”

Roswaal: “Those words are reassuring. I’m honestly pleased with Emilia-sama’s growth… Alright, putting aside the anxieties of the journey as something to be taken care of by each of you, there is one importaaaant~ thing to note—— It’s Ram.”

Everyone: "————"

Roswaal said that with a lower voice, and it made Subaru and the others' expressions changed.

Emilia's long eyelashes twitched, while Subaru's cheeks stiffened as if sinking into deep thought. And then Julius, the only person unrelated to the camp at this place, frowned slightly.

Julius: "Regarding what you are saying, is it truly fine if I am present? Mathers-kyo[12], as Anastasia's Knight, to discuss the state of camp affairs is… Although I am a mere servant, you should understand that revealing them would not be a good idea."

Roswaal: "It's not like I proposed the idea without caring about anything and anybooooody~. Julius Juukulius-dono. After seeing your behavior at your mansion, and the way you behave with Subaru-kun, I have come to understand that you are a reliable person. I would like you to believe that, and so that's why I am requesting a favor of you."

Subaru: "This is the shadiest you've sounded in a long time, Ros-chi."

Emilia: "Sorry, I kinda thought so too…"

When Roswaal replied to Julius's worry with a serious voice, Subaru and Emilia both raised their hands up almost in tandem and teased him.

Even ignoring his past criminal offenses, what Roswaal had stated was too uncharacteristic of himself. He said "It's not liiike~ that", perhaps because he himself was aware of how atypical he had been. Sending a wry smile at Subaru and the others' way, he then continued,

Roswaal: "Weeell~, maybe my lack of persuasion just can't be helped. Julius-kun is doing everything he can so other camps can find faults… I really do think you do not possess a lowly personality. That's why I want you to listen too. This is a life-threatening matter, after all."

Julius: "Life …"

When Julius whispered that with an extremely serious face, Roswaal said "Yes, life", and nodded.

[12] The «-kyo» honorific (卿) equates the English «sir».

Roswaal: “As Subaru-kun and Emilia-sama know, Ram’s constitution is just a little special. Her body cannot withstand the talent that was poured onto her. Or perhaps, you could say that her body cannot provide the fuel proper for the flame called talent.”

Subaru: “…You know, I’ve never heard about it in such detail.”

Roswaal: “Is that so? Theeen~, how about her being an Oni?”

Subaru: “Well, that’s…”

Of course, he knew that Ram and Rem were both Onis.

More than twice now, he had been saved by Rem, who could exert her Oni power to her heart’s content by growing her horn. He had also heard from Ram herself about how she lost her horn and was “hornless”.

Therefore, Subaru thought that it really was not something surprising,

Julius: “——An Oni, you say?”

Subaru: “Julius?”

The person who lowered his voice and revealed his astonishment was the person next to him, Julius. On his handsome face, his eyebrows had been lifted, a disturbance visible in his yellow eyes.

Julius: “I have heard that the Oni Clan has been destroyed.”

Roswaal: “About ten years ago, their last settlement was burnt down, and Ram was the last survivor… Sorry, including Rem, the two sisters are the last survivors.”

Subaru: “————”

It was a loaded statement, but Subaru did not butt into the conversation. He was more surprised at how those sisters were part of a rarer species than expected, more than irritated.

Emilia: “Is there a reason as to why the Onis have perished?”

Roswaal: “…Rest assured, Emilia-sama. The downfall of the Onis was inevitable because of natural selection. It was a result of them not going along with the flow of the times and clinging onto old customs.

They didn't lower in numbers because of discrimination and prejudice, consequently being destroyed, assuredly."

Emilia: "…I see."

Emilia made an understanding, melancholic look at Roswaal's explanation.

She too was of a rare birthplace; Emilia was a half-elf. It was natural for her to feel unease and some sympathy for the Oni Clan that had perished, having left the two of them behind.

Subaru: "We get that those two are all the members of the Oni Clan. So what?"

Subaru sensed the conversation starting to stagnate, so he moved the conversation with an intentionally loud voice. When Emilia and Julius lifted their faces in response to that voice, Roswaal touched his chin and spoke,

Roswaal: "Putting aside Rem, whose bodily activity has ceased, there is a deficiency in Ram's body, just like I said earlier. Thiiis~ is because she lost an organ that is important for the Oni Clan. That organ is the horn. Essentially, the enormous amount of Mana that powers her body, which should be supplied by her horn—— isn't readily available, and so her body is constantly plagued by pain and fatigue."

Emilia: "That's how it is…!?"

Roswaal: "It's no wonder that Emilia-same is surprised. That girl is too strong. Not once has that caused her to have a frown on her face, after aaall~."

In response to Emilia, whose throat had caught, Roswaal shook his head slowly.

Emilia's shock was shared by Subaru. He was aware that Ram had no horn. From Rem's words, he also knew that Ram had possessed outstanding abilities before losing her horn.

It was just that, he had not realized that there was a penalty for lacking a horn beyond the decline of ability and that it was eroding her, even now.

Julius: "——I see. I have come to understand Mathers-kyo's thoughts."

Then, Julius suddenly spoke, having only heard the conversation until then, and nodded. Roswaal raises his eyebrows and hummed in response to that, and then Subaru and Emilia looked at each other as well.

The flow of the conversation had only them confirming Ram's constitution. Julius adjusted his bangs in front of Subaru and the others, who were shocked, as if he understood Roswaal's request.

Julius: "The Oni Clan possess traits like the ability to manipulate an enormous amount of Mana, and possess a strong body boasting quite the fighting strength. The essential thing that supports those two traits is the horn, which no other species possesses—— If an Oni's horn fails to fulfill its role and they suffer for it, there must be a replacement that fulfills the role of a horn."

Roswaal: "I can only lament not knowing your name, seeing how intelligent you are. Being seen through that much from so little is a gooood feeling."

Emilia: "Oh, so that's how it is…"

Roswaal admired Julius for his explanation. Emilia also clapped her hands from achieving understanding. On the hand, Subaru was the one person still perplexed and left behind. When the situation came to magical powers, Subaru was nothing but slow to understand them, as he was an amateur.

Subaru: "Don't just understand it by yourselves like that. What exactly does this mean?"

Julius: "It is a simple affair. Miss Ram's body is seeking the same amount of Mana from the outside as it did back when she had a horn. She lost her horn, and as she cannot find the Mana, then someone else is required to provide a means for an external source… That is where we may come in."

Roswaal: "Although, normally I would take that role and supply her secretly at niiight~."

Subaru: "…Ah!?"

Inside Subaru, Julius's lecture and Roswaal's words allow the cogwheels of his brains to catch.

Every night, he would see Ram rush to Roswaal's location with excitement. To be honest, Subaru looked away from the vividness of the suspicious relationship between a master and a maid.

After understanding the circumstances, thinking back on it, perhaps this was all there was?

Roswaal: “Something come to your mind, Subaru-kun?”

Subaru: “N-no, nothing important. Go ahead and continue.”

Roswaal: “You sure?”

Even though the misunderstanding he had held for over a year had been cleared up, it still was not enough to correct it.

In the first place, Roswaal’s family were a bunch bursting with shadiness, with how they had tried to meet with the Witch Echidna for generations and generations. Roswaal himself was remarkably attached to Echidna, something that was difficult to forget. Upon finding out that he was not cheating on her with Ram, he became even more convinced of his obsession.

Julius: “Though, there is one caveat, Mathers-kyo. Regarding that request, I feel like I am not competent enough to take it up.”

To Subaru’s side, who was having useless thoughts, Julius shook his head apologetically. That action made Roswaal squint his eyes.

Roswaal: “It doesn’t seem that it is not a reason borne of humbleness, or out of a wish to not support people from a different camp… Offering Ram Mana would require Fire, Water, Wind, and Earth attributes. Just from those, you would be more fit for the job than Emilia-sama.”

Julius: “Mathers-kyo, you probably hold these expectations because of these girls around me.”

With that said, Julius loosened his lips with a frail smile. Then, the man who had responded revealed faint lights flying around, six kinds of light being visible.

They were known as the six Quasi Spirits that Julius had contracted with—— However, as of right now,

Julius: “About my buds… As of now, their connection with me is gone. Though, if their original titles still remained, I would not have any qualms in accepting a request.”

Roswaal: “Your Contract with the Spirits has been severed from having your Name taken away… huh. That being said, it seems like the Spirits aren’t trying to leeeave~ you.”

Julius: “Perhaps there are remains of the lost connection inside of them. Or perhaps it was bleached over, and the Contract is still there, albeit invisible… Either way, I am only being saved by these buds’ kindness, with how they are not abandoning someone unskilled like myself. There is little left in this body, so I wonder if my poor abilities would be able to help.”

Julius exposed the connection with the Quasi Spirits, and sighed. After that, he looked at Subaru for nary a second. Subaru could not instantly figure out what he wanted with that look, so all he could do was to look troubled.

Julius: “——As of right now, I am merely a devoted Knight. My apologies.”

Roswaal: “I seeee~. That’s too bad. It is serious damage, but…”

Emilia: “It’s fine. If Julius can’t do it, then leave it up to me.”

Roswaal also lowered his tone due to Julius’s sadness, but the person who took his place, puffed up with pride, was Emilia. Energetically moving forward, she brought out her own Micro Spirits around her.

Emilia: “They’re a little different from Julius’s Quasi Spirits, but I can borrow the powers of the Micro Spirits too. The Fire attribute is too strong with just my magic, but if the Micro Spirits can lend me their powers, then I can use magic of different affinities too. How’s that sound?”

Roswaal: “Of course, I had thought of asking not only him but Emilia-sama as well, so there shouldn’t be a problem if you are willing to do it. Hooowever~, I believe there will be extreme trouble at first with stabilizing your magic. For assistance with that, please borrow Beatrice’s abilities for help.”

Subaru: “Beako’s?”

Roswaal: “Beatrice really is excelleeeent~ with magic theory and employing it, wouldn’t you agree? Right now she is connected to Subaru-kun, so I feel like there is some wasted talent, but things are working out despite the lacking magical power, right? In regards to that knowledge, I would like you to refer yourself to Emilia-sama for that.”

Subaru: “Don’t call it lacking magic. But, I understand.”

There was no problem if Ram's burden became lighter through Emilia and Beatrice's cooperation. Subaru had begun to be convinced, but right after he nodded, he cocked his head in puzzlement.

Subaru: "No, wait. If that's the case, then why are you telling me this, instead of saying it directly to Beatrice? I mean, I want to listen too, but it would be logical to tell this to Beako."

Roswaal: "Because if I talk to Beatrice, obvioooously~ she will say it's meaningless and refuse. Beatrice is more bitter with me than you think. Perhaps you could tell her to be a bit mooore~ lenient with her criticism towards me?"

Subaru: "Ah, not happening. If I had to say which side I'm on, I would say that I'm completely on Beako's side, after all."

He declined Roswaal's request with ease, who had a pitiful look on his face.

Things were done and that fact could not be changed. It was no trench that would be filled up in just a year, give or take. The times were not so nice that she would simply open her heart with someone who would have had her killed, had the events been a bit different.

Subaru: "Now that I think about it, isn't it a bit troubling how I am doing things with people who've killed me and people who've beaten me up…?"

Emilia: "Ah, Subaru, you've got that look like you're getting carried away with yourself."

Subaru: "Do I really look like that sometimes!?"

Anyhow, he had accepted Roswaal's request.

As for Ram, Emilia and Beatrice would handle her. Emilia was motivated to do it, so there shouldn't be any problem if Subaru talked to Beatrice later.

Roswaal: "I'm counting on you, Subaru-kun."

Subaru: "Huh, this really is special. You rarely ever say things like that."

Roswaal: "You are becoming admirable—— This is the first time Ram has requested to leave my side, after all."

Subaru: “————”

That was the only thing Roswaal said that didn’t give off a joking feeling, instead speaking with seriousness.

Removing his gaze from Subaru’s face, he looked up at the blue sky.

Roswaal: “Ram and I have no memory of her younger twin sister. But, I suppose the people involved still hold some feelings. Seeing Ram emotionally going against my opinion like that is chilling—— So, I want to ask you guys to talk to her.”

Subaru: “…Yeah, I’ll remember that.”

Even after the incident at Sanctuary that had taken place a year ago, Ram devoted herself to Roswaal. Despite Roswaal saying that anything and everything came second after the one and only thing that was most important, he still held a soft spot for Ram, as someone who had gone to such lengths to devote herself.

If that could be called a change, then by no means was it a bad one.

Or at least, it was far better being human and worrying with unmanageable emotions, than it was burdening friends as an incomprehensible monster.

Roswaal: “——Seems like it’s time.”

Before he could speak further, Roswaal turned around.

The mansion’s door opened behind him, and four girls appeared on the other side. All of them made up for the entirety of the maids of Roswaal’s mansion. Seeing them all together was a pretty magnificent view.

That being said, one of the girls was sleeping, and another girl, who looked extremely similar to the sleeping one, had an appearance of having prepared for a journey, so their beauty was slightly lacking.

Frederica: “Master, the preparations for the two are set.”

Roswaal: “I appreciate your diligence—— Ram, be careful on the trip.”

Roswaal replied to Frederica, who had given her report very quietly, and called out to Ram, who was equipped for the journey. Upon hearing that, Ram pinched the edge of her skirt and bowed politely.

Ram: “Roswaal-sama, thank you for granting my selfish request. I will definitely bring back results you deserve.”

Roswaal: “I’ll be looking forward to it. Although, make sure you don’t do anything unreasonaaable~. Also, make sure the two of them, Emilia-sama and Subaru-kun, don’t do anything unreasonable either. That is also part of your role as well, after aaaall~.”

Ram: “I am fully aware of that.”

He wanted to retort to those words, but Ram’s glare silenced him. Subaru gave in to that look, and looked at the short figure next to Ram.

There, was Rem. She was in clothes suitable for the trip, and was now being carried in a wheelchair driven by Petra—— Subaru had relied on his memory to replicate something from his original work.

A model of the wheelchair already existed in this world, but quite an amount of work had been put into remodeling it; it possessed caster-like front wheels that wouldn’t pose a hindrance when changing directions, along with a scaffold and a modified seat. Of course, seat belts and cushions to protect her head had been implemented as well.

It was a one-of-a-kind wheelchair that Subaru had had Roswaal produce by spending Subaru’s own salary.

Subaru: “I’m worried about the maintenance when we get far, but…”

Frederica: “Subaru-sama is clever, and the materials are what they are, so I believe it could handle being used for two months. Of course, please do not do anything unreasonable.”

Petra: “Please be careful, Subaru…-sama.”

Receiving Frederica’s endorsement, he took over the wheelchair’s handle from Petra. Accepting it, and going behind Rem, he felt a lot more ease this way compared to carrying her on his back.

This was because the road was pavement. It wouldn’t be effective in the desert, on grass, or on gravel.

Subaru: "*Yoshi*[13], looks like it'll work. Petra, Frederica, you guys take care too."

Frederica: "Please leave the Master to us."

Petra: "We'll be taking care of Otto-san and Garfiel-san too."

Petra and Frederica replied to Subaru accompanied with a nod while he moved the wheelchair.

Even if the trip were to take a couple of months, Otto and the others at Pristella would probably be healed up, and so they should be coming back to the Roswaal residence.

He left that up to the maids, who would take care of stuff while they were gone. Subaru pushed the wheelchair and turned towards the dragon carriage.

Subaru: "Alright then, it's a shame, but I guess we should depart now."

Ram: "Why must Barusu boss people around? Don't get so full of yourself."

Subaru: "I'm not bossing you around, though. How about you take over then?"

Ram: "Does Ram appear to have such ill manners to you? Ram would appreciate it if you don't make her behave like that, as a maid who needs to be graceful and considerate."

Subaru: "What's up with you? Are you at that age where you can do nothing but complain?"

Ram: "It is not the case. It's just that…"

Then, she cut off her sentence, and Ram threw a meaningful look at Subaru's hand. As of right now, Subaru was pushing Rem's wheelchair. He guessed the meaning of that look, and let out a deep sigh.

Subaru: "If you want to switch places, then just say so…"

Ram: "Given the meaning and purpose of Ram coming along, it is only natural to give that up to me… As for guessing what Ram wanted without having her put it into words, you are now seen in a better light."

[13] Engrish flip. Means "okay/alright" (よし), originally "OK".

With Subaru reluctantly giving up his position, Ram took his place and pushed the wheelchair. She showed care for her sleeping sister sitting on the wheelchair as it slowly headed forward toward the dragon carriage.

Subaru opened and closed his hand for no reason as saw their backs take off. Then, a small hand gently grabbed his own from the side.

Subaru: “Oh, it’s Beako.”

Beatrice: “You don’t have to make a pathetic look like that, it’s not that you have to worry because your feelings for that girl are weaker than the feelings her sister has, so you don’t have to worry, in fact. Subaru should just be himself, and do what he can do, I suppose.”

Subaru: “That’s not quite… Or well, that’s how it is?”

It wasn’t as if he felt like his role had been taken away from him, but looking from the outside, perhaps the look on his face could be understand in such a manner.

Subaru touched his cheek with his free hand, pulled on it, and pinched it. Then, this time his hand was snatched away by a different white hand.

Emilia: “Yeah, yeah, I’ll take that hand.”

Subaru: “Oh, Emilia-tan…”

Beatrice: “After that girl wakes up, we’ll have to see what Subaru will do with both his hands taken, in fact.”

Emilia: “Ah, I might be interested in that too.”

Subaru had been caught in between Emilia and Beatrice, looking at them with embarrassment. However, he was only returned with two things, a serious look and an anticipating look. To make matters worse, Petra’s own gaze was piercing him from behind, and even Ram was throwing him a cold, scornful look, having turned around in front of the dragon carriage.

He was being unbelievably surrounded on all sides—— Then, Julius let out a “Hmm” accompanied with a nod, while witnessing that. In response to that craving for a reaction, Subaru’s lips slanted grandly.

Subaru: “What is it? If you have something to say, say it. Go ahead!”

Julius: “Really? Alright then, I shall say merely one thing—— You really could not be more blessed as a man, being surrounded by beautiful girls like that. I cannot help but feel a lot of doubt on whether your hands are able to satisfy all of those flowers.”

Subaru: “What’s this, I’m being blamed!? Did I do something wrong!?”

Julius shrugged his shoulders with a shocked face, as the pathetic shout Subaru replied him with soared towards the heavens.

Unfortunately for him, at this place were neither the Internal Affairs Minister nor the Head Military Officer to follow up on his statement.

Subaru had no choice but to fight alone in this upcoming two-month journey.

Understanding that reality, he felt the trust and the deep affection of the warmth being transmitted into his hands fill up his chest. He felt anxiety in his chest about not falling behind. That was the type of morning it was, the one they had departed on.

Arc 6 Chapter 6 – The Juukulius Inscription

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 2 “Overcome Sand Time!”, Part 1, and Volume 21, Prologue “On the Road”

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

The journey had begun with a morning filled with unease, and the journey, which had lasted for about a month, had been long. However, no significant accidents happened along the way.

They went straight along the main road towards the east. It was a boring journey, in which nothing had happened.

Subaru: “It was like that with the round trip to Pristella, and it was like that with the Lifaus Plains… But Kingdom of Lugunica’s pretty safe when on the road, eh?”

Julius: “Maintaining the roads and patrolling them to maintain the public order is essential to protect the Kingdom’s peace. Lugunica is particularly thorough with such aspects, even when compared to other countries. There should be low rates of damage from groups of bandits and Witchbeasts.”

Subaru: “Are you saying other countries aren’t like that?”

Julius: “In the Holy Kingdom of Gusteko, being always covered in ice and snow, it is impossible to properly maintain the roads in the first place. The roads are deep in the snow that was there from the start. As for the Vollachian Empire and the Kararagi City States, there are many people of all sorts of different races and customs. Such cultural differences may lead to quarrels. In that sense, it may be hard to say that public order is kept there.”

Subaru: “I see.”

As Subaru and Julius had their conversation, the two ground dragons’ were running energetically, their heads side-by-side as they cut through the wind.

Subaru's Patrasche and Julius' blue cavalry dragon were leading them ahead, the two pulling the large dragon carriage.

Everyone in the dragon carriage would be late to react to the occasion of emergencies. That was the arrangement they had, but as was noticeable from the conversation they were having out of boredom, the journey was peaceful.

Subaru: "Ahh…"

Julius: "Subaru."

On top of the journey being boring, with how the scenery wasn't changing, he started to yawn. Subaru put his hand on his mouth and became full of drowsiness, as Julius gave him a blaming look.

While entrusting his weight to his beloved dragon, he quickly lifted his bangs that were kept from swaying through the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion.

Julius: "I understand that you want to get rid of this feeling of tension, but the moments you loosen your stiffness are the most dangerous ones. I am not saying that you are allowing your mind to wander off, to act in a way that anyone witnessing would perceive as lazy is unacceptable."

Subaru: "Just how much are you gonna say just because of one yawn? Even you at least yawn too. Right?"

Julius: "Of course I have those kind of bodily functions. But, if you possess the self-consciousness of a Knight, then it should be possible to hold it in when in front of other people, you know? That is what you still lack."

Subaru: "Yeah, yeah."

He was pressing for a reaction with piercingly sarcastic force, but Subaru was already becoming a master of parrying it. It was already nearing twenty days in this journey accompanied by Julius. From Pristella to the mansion, and now on their way to the Augria Sand Dunes, they had been making the ground dragons run side-by-side. And so, he had learned how to deal with him.

Julius: "I thought it was a part of manners to look at the person you are talking with when having a serious conversation?"

Subaru: “The person is looking away during the serious conversation because he hadn’t asked to have said conversation. You should take it easy too. You’re straining yourself too much.”

Julius: “You and I are on watchout duty, that is why…”

Subaru: “You don’t have to be so nervous; they won’t attack us just like that. If anyone tries to jump us, they’re not gonna do it in the middle of nowhere.”

Julius: “————”

Subaru interrupted him, speaking as he cracked his head. Julius blinked his eyes, as if Subaru had said something unexpected. After that, this handsome man let out a small sigh.

Julius: “Is it clear that I am impatient right now, in your eyes?”

Subaru: “Yeah, I have a feeling it’s a shot in the dark, though. But, I feel like everyone thinks you’re straining yourself. More than usu… Actually, you might just be acting like your usual self…”

Julius: “As of right now, you are the only person who knows that I am being my usual self, after all.”

Subaru: “…Yeah.”

When Julius’s lowered his tone, Subaru also naturally dropped his.

They couldn’t hear the girls’ conversations back in the dragon carriage, so the girls should not be able to hear their conversation either.

It was a complicated relationship between two men, but as of right now, they were working together. Perhaps this was a time when they should speak a little more frankly.

Subaru: “It’s been talked about with Roswaal before, but how are your Quasi Spirits?”

Julius: “It is as I have stated previously. The buds are gathered around me, but they will not rest their feathers on the arm I hold out as a perch. It seems my words do not reach them either.”

Julius raised his arm in response to Subaru’s question, and the Quasi Spirits came into view.

The six Quasi Spirits shining faintly still remained floating around Julius, as he made the ground dragons run. However, they flickered on the hand he had held out as if in confusion, and attempted to move away.

Indeed, it seemed that the bond between Julius and his Quasi Spirits had been severed.

Subaru: "Can you not contract them yet again? You're attracting them somehow, so doesn't that mean your Divine Protection is working?"

Julius: "It seems like my Divine Protection of Gathering Spirits is still going strong. And in turn, it contributes to these girls' incomprehensible awareness. It is like certain large, incomprehensible, unmanageable emotions are present."

Subaru: "Not sure if I should say it like this, but how about taking measures through other Spirits?"

Julius: "I would have considered that idea, were I a Spiritual Arts User that could borrow the powers of Micro Spirits present everywhere, much in the vein of Emilia-sama… But I cannot bring out the Spirits' utmost abilities in such a way. I needed a few years to bind with these buds too, after all."

Subaru: "…Well, it is true that Emilia-tan can't bring out Puck's average power from other Spirits too. I guess becoming *aikata*[14] with a Spirit is a special thing after all."

Julius: "Emilia-sama and the Great Spirit. And like you and Beatrice-sama."

It was rough. As a fellow Spiritual Arts User, Subaru was unable to say something like "Go find the next Spirits" right away. It would be like asking him to let go of Beatrice even after their bond had been cut off. Of course, he would raise his middle finger and refuse as a response. As for Julius, his relationship with the six Quasi Spirits was the exact same thing.

Julius: "Therefore, as of right now, I can only use swordsmanship to fulfill my duties as a Knight. Of course, I do not believe the sword inferior to the Spiritual Arts, but it is true that my abilities make it insufficient."

[14] Engrish flip. Means "partner (who shares one's load)" (相肩), originally "パートナー" (partner). The word chosen isn't the best here, but given Subaru and Beatrice's deep relationship, it feels fitting.

Subaru: “This is also a journey to get that back, and with your sword skills you saying that is mere sarcasm. And if it’s me who you’re fighting against, it’s even more sarcastic.”

As Julius had mentioned, there was his insufficient ability aside the Spiritual Arts.

A year ago, at the Royal Capital’s Training Ground, that ability had been the one that had ravaged Subaru. Subaru did become better compared to back then, but it did not feel like the distance had been fully covered. From Julius’s point of view, fighting Subaru at that time was like taking candy from a baby. The current Subaru was as difficult as dealing with a five-year-old. That was just about how different they were.

Subaru: “Reinhard is also like that, you guys have a bad habit of underestimating yourselves. Too much humility turns into poison! I think that type of words is used everywhere.”

Julius: “I want to return the same phrase to you, but hmm—— You and I aside, Reinhard most likely is not being humble or underestimating of himself.”

Subaru: “Not being humble or underestimating…?”

That instant, he imagined the redhead hero, but he cocked his head at the difference in his perception of the man.

He had never thought that he would run into differing opinions on Reinhard, because from anyone’s perspective, he was the strongest, completely peerless, a superman.

In response to Subaru’s doubt, Julius spoke a “No”, shaking his head.

Julius: “In regards to Reinhard’s true strength, you and I both rate it highly. Most likely, everyone who is aware of him shares the same sentiment. They all think that that he is the peak of humans, or that perhaps that he transcends humans.”

Subaru: “It’s amazing how that isn’t an overstatement.”

Julius: “Not only his real ability, but his way of being has likewise been perfected. I first met him when I was around ten years old… But it has never changed.”

Subaru: “Ever since you were ten? Are you for real?”

As he gripped onto Patrasche's bridle, Subaru was astonished by Julius's recollections.

Just when had Reinhard become the person he was now? He thought it was quite the philosophical question, but at the very least, it seemed that the version of himself from about a decade ago had been completed.

Which meant, that boy had carried a very heroic fate on his shoulders.

Subaru: "Reinhard has been the Sword Saint since then?"

Julius: "He was five years of age when the Divine Protection of the Sword Saint was inherited by him. The previous Sword Saint was Thearesia van Astrea-sama… Reinhard's grandmother. She passed away in the Great Subjugation fifteen years ago, and the Divine Protection was transferred to him."

Subaru: "Yeah, I was aware of that."

The previous Sword Saint, who had perished in battle with the White Whale, yet still was humiliated after death. Reinhard's grandmother, Wilhelm's wife, but this time, at Pristella, the soul of that woman finally returned to the heavens.

However, fifteen years ago, Reinhard had inherited that Divine Protection.

Subaru: "How does he feel…"

Julius: "Hm?"

Subaru: "He received his grandmother's Divine Protection at the age of five, and to make matters worse, he is descended from the blood of a legendary hero? I can't imagine how he feels."

——Subaru somewhat understood the weight of holding up to parental expectations.

Subaru could empathize with the the pain of being crushed by the weight of the expectations of those surrounding him.

Of course, the weight and the responsibilities Subaru and Reinhard carried were extremely different, so comparing himself to Reinhard may have been rude in itself.

Subaru: “I honestly am so weak. I’m so weak that I’m always frustrated because I’m weak and not good enough, there’s not a night that goes by without me wishing to be strong enough to hold my own.”

Julius: “I feel like that’s pretty groundless.”

Subaru: “Shut up.”

In the middle of his important speech, Subaru was made fun of, causing him to click his tongue.

Subaru: “Anyhow, I personally feel his worries despite being on the polar opposite. I don’t think Reinhard is the same as he was when he was five, but I do wonder how he felt back then.”

Julius: “As you would expect, I also do not know what he felt back in those days. But…”

Cutting off his words, Julius then lifted his face. Gripping tightly onto the bridle, looking in front of him, Julius squinted at the sunlight that bathed him in a daze.

Julius: “——The time I first saw Reinhard was the big turning point for me.”

Somewhere from those words, pride was oozing out. Julius was squinting from the sunlight, but perhaps he may have not been squinting because of the sun.

Perhaps, back then, he had gazed at Reinhard in the same way.

Subaru: “Which means that you and Reinhard have known each other for about a decade, I guess. I do think that barely satisfies the requirements for you guys to be childhood friends, but is that right?”

Julius: “No? Yes, that was when I became aware of Reinhard, but he only found out about me long after… When I was appointed as a Royal Guard. That happened when I was sixteen, so I have known him personally for six years.”

Subaru: “…That’s a very big empty period of time, isn’t it?”

Julius: “At the time, I was not qualified enough to stand alongside someone who had just taken over as the Sword Saint. The fact that he was younger than me too was a painful reminder, and that was my beginning.”

Julius said his words quietly, while his tone of voice was passionate on the contrary.

In response to the distant look his yellow eyes contained, Subaru nodded at that one word, “beginning”.

Despite the vague wording, that day was probably vivid within Julius. If that was Julius’s beginning, then it was a given for it to be clear in his memory.

Subaru’s memory of his own beginning was hot in his chest, seared into his soul.

The time he was saved by Emilia in a different world, the time Rem supported his back about to collapse, the time he took Beatrice’s hand amidst the flames, all those times, to Subaru, were “beginning”.

Subaru: “When you say that was your beginning, does that mean you were surprisingly naughty as a kid? Like debauched aristocrat or a son of loose morals.”

He went against the flow of emotions in the other person’s affair, and spoke with an intentionally teasing voice.

There was no way that was Julius’s case, but upon first meeting him, he really did think that the latter was a young gaudy noble. And if it were to be a story, it was seemingly a given that this young noble had lived a haughty life in his boyhood.

With those feelings in mind, Subaru changed the topic to alter the flow of the conversation, which made Julius suddenly loosen his lips,

Julius: “I would prefer if you changed the way you express it. Just a little… but there are parts that I cannot deny.”

Subaru: “Seriously!? You really were a gaudy noble!? Did you kick commoners from the top of a horse, and persistently pressure servants by bullying them!?”

Julius: “I cannot help but wonder as to why you are expressing such glee.”

Julius sent a cold look at Subaru, who got excited. After that, Julius peeked behind himself.

Perhaps he was concerned about not only the dragon carriage, but the girls in it as well. Of course, to go to such lengths to confirm that they were uncapable of hearing their conversation was unnecessary, but it was a matter of him feeling like doing it.

Julius: “How much do you know about the Juukulius Family?”

Subaru: “Nothing at all.”

Julius: “You answered so immediately that it seems you feel pleased about it.”

He really did have zero background knowledge.

Subaru threw out his chest, dexterously on top of the dragon, and Julius displayed a strained smile. After that, he felt his Knight’s sword on his waist. Perhaps it was handed down through Julius’s family. From his face, it was plain for all to say that he felt some trepidation about having the qualifications to wield it himself at this time.

Julius: “——I am not the original heir of the Juukulius Family.”

Subaru: “————”

Julius: “To put it more accurately, I should say that I am not the official heir. Alviero Juukulius is the current Head of the House of Juukulius. My father, Klein Juukulius, was his younger brother. As he has already passed away, I have been adopted by the Family Head.”

Subaru did not respond to those words, as they had been more surprising than expected.

It was difficult to say how much the structure of this world’s noble society meshed with Subaru’s knowledge of the society he knew, but Julius’s position definitely was complicated.

Also, in that case, then what was the position of his younger brother, Joshua Juukulius? That young man, who adored his older brother Julius, was now lost from the memories of the world.

Julius: “I do not know what is the actual natural of the relationship I have with Joshua, left back at Pristella. Is he my own younger brother that has inherited the blood of my real father, Klein Juukulius? Or is he a true, legitimate child that inherited the blood of my foster father, Alviero Juukulius?”

Subaru: "…What's the difference?"

Julius: "«Siblings» is merely a figure of speech, so perhaps our relationship would essentially be cousins. In that case, the position of Head of the House of Juukulius would be inherited by Joshua Juukulius, most likely."

Subaru: "————"

Julius had delivered those words in a flat manner, and just from that, he was convinced of their veracity.

Even though this pertained to himself, this conversation was complex because Julius himself was unaware of his position. If Julius and Joshua were real siblings, then Julius would be the one in succession for the House of Juukulius. However, if Julius and Joshua were not blood brothers, then it would be correct to say that Joshua would be the one in succession for the House of Juukulius.

And then Julius did not know how to confirm that; Joshua's existence had been wiped from the world, and Julius had lost his memories of his brother. For that reason, he was cognizant of where he stood.

Julius: "It is somewhat unavoidable, but when I think about it, my position has become very complicated. Not knowing about your own tomorrow is not very appealing, although as of now, I should worry more about myself being unable to ground myself, than I should about the House of Juukulius's leadership."

Subaru: "————"

Julius said that in a seemingly joking way, perhaps because Subaru had received a surprising shock.

Subaru's mouth was dry, grinding his teeth while feeling irritation in his stomach. He was ridiculously worried about Julius, with how he was right now.

Julius: "Because of my upbringing, at the time, I was unconfident. My foster father led me to the Royal Castle, and that was when I showed the poor etiquette I had been taught just as we were about to depart. There, I laid my eyes on Reinhard, who was an eight-year-old—— That's all there is to it."

Albeit forcefully, Julius chose to end the conversation.

There was no courage to deliver a retort or even some sort of clever remark. Subaru saw Julius look ahead in a lonesome way, and he stopped biting his molars.

And then, what came out right away was a question.

Subaru: “Why’d you suddenly feel like telling that to me?”

Julius: “I believe you were the one who enquired. Perhaps I was mistaken?”

Subaru: “No, that’s true and all… that’s my bad, but that’s not where I’m getting at. Isn’t it weird for you to have this kind of talk with me?”

Julius: “No, it is not. This affair was common knowledge for Reinhard and Ferris… For people among the Royal Guards. Of course, Anastasia-sama also knows too. It’s nothing special.”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru did not understand one bit, as his face turned into a frown.

Even if he said that it was something everyone was aware of, that did not mean it was something he could spread around. After all, those words sounded unnatural.

Perhaps Julius understood Subaru’s discontent from his frown. He pulled onto the bridle, and quickened the beloved dragon’s pace just a bit.

Julius: “Yes, it is something everyone is aware of—— So that was why I might have wished for you to know about it just now. You, the person who remembers the most about me in this world, right now.”

The blue ground dragon accelerated while swinging its tail, and Julius’s expression could no longer be seen.

That being said, he was not going so fast as to leave him behind in the dirt. It was his way of smugly declaring the end of the conversation, as usual, simple as that.

???: “————”

Subaru: “Hmm, it’s fine. Thanks for the concern, Patrasche.”

The running jet-black ground dragon had raised her head, glancing at Subaru. In response to her gesture, which said “Shall we rival the ground dragon ahead?”, Subaru showed his thanks and petted the head of that lady.

Subaru: “…That was uncharacteristic of me.”

Those small, sullen words poured out from his mouth.

Was he becoming weak? Or perhaps, was he putting on airs as a protagonist of a tragedy?

As a matter of fact, “irritating” was the only word his feelings could be expressed.

Subaru: “Ahh, dammit. What am I, an idiot? No, I am an idiot…”

Subaru scratched his head, and he released his irritation only from his mouth.

In the end, he had not found any accurate response to what Julius had spoken this time.

And he would have no accurate response until they had just reached the Augria Sand Dunes.

Said answer would not come, even after the party had arrived at the town of Mirula, the nearest one to the Sand Dunes.

Arc 6 Chapter 7 - Aim for the Sand Sea

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 2 “Overcome Sand Time!”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

The town nearest to the Augria Sand Dunes, Mirula, truly was a deserted inn town.

The town was of a reasonable size, but of course, it paled considerably when compared to places such as the Watergate City of Pristella, Industrial City of Costuul, and the Royal Capital of Lugunica.

The roads that stretched all throughout the Kingdom were well-kept. It had been steady trip on the dragon carriage all the way to Mirula, but that final destination of the east end was as lacking as it could’ve been.

Emilia: “But perhaps that just can’t be helped. Looking at the map, from here on out towards the there’s only the Augria Sand Dunes… and the Kingdom’s biggest forest to the south, right? We’re far away from the five major cities, and we can also see that there isn’t much pedestrian traffic.”

Emilia let out that impression while looking around the town, walking besides Subaru.

She was wearing a white robe that covered her head, her beautiful silver hair and face concealed. A beautiful girl like Emilia appearing at a rural area would be a blow to the townspeople’s sense of beauty—— that was Subaru joking, but she did also have a position of high standing. That was why she showed slight consideration to avoid any trouble, not just for her appearance, but for her identity as well.

That being said, those weren’t the only reasons as to why her head and her mouth were hidden by cloth. The other reason to conceal oneself, other than her identity, was Mirula’s renowned disaster, the Sand Wind.

Subaru: “It can’t expand to the east nor south, and on top of that, there’s always this Sand Wind. That’s rough.”

Emilia stood downwind, while Subaru stood upwind to act as a slight resistance to the wind while he pulled up the cloth he wrapped around his face, murmuring those words while covering his mouth. Whenever he moved his tongue, he would feel sand rubbing between his teeth, and it made him feel quite sick.

This sandy wind came flowing into the town, as if blowing down from the sand dunes to the east. It seemed that the Sand Wind would blow against the town continuously on days of strong wind, and for that reason it was imperative to wear sand-protecting fashion like this, just for the purpose of walking through town.

Emilia: “——? Subaru, what’s wrong?”

Subaru: “It’s nothing. I was just thinking about how this turned out different than what I had imagined when I heard it was a desert.”

Emilia tilted her head at Subaru, glancing at him sideways.

Her bare body was concealed to the utmost limit, covered from head-to-toe in a cloak. Subaru’s thoughts were basically that beautiful girls should please the eyes of the people around them with various outfits. However, they couldn’t be eye candy with outfits of such high defense.

Speaking of the desert, that dancer-like outfit to protect against the sunlight—— what was it called?

Subaru: “Nevertheless, perhaps we should’ve listened to the innkeeper’s advice.”

Emilia: “It’s Sand Time right now, right? There’s no one in the streets, after all.”

The wind wasn’t very strong, but perhaps because it was light, a small dust cloud had formed. In this yellow, hazy field of vision, nobody besides Subaru and Emilia could be seen in streets of this town.

The townspeople, completely accustomed to this environment, would shut themselves inside during Sand Time, that was, when the Sand Wind blew, and even the gaps in the doors and windows of the buildings would be sealed.

In truth, within the Sand Wind, not only being able to see but being able to breathe too took considerable effort. It was so bad that the innkeeper had stopped them, saying that they shouldn't go out during Sand Time.

However, there was a reason as to why they had disregarded the innkeeper who had halted them, and went outside anyway.

Subaru: "This is how it is in the town. The Sand Wind at the sand dunes isn't like this, right?"

Emilia: "…Mhm, I think so."

It wasn't a dry run per say, but they had purposely gone outside during Sand Time to prepare themselves mentally.

Outside of Sand Time, the circumstances of the sand dunes, which had Sand Wind blowing and sand spread in every direction, were not ideal for travel. They were distant from the sand dunes, and they couldn't see well in this town dense with buildings.

They had to prepare themselves at once for the severeness of the sand dunes' path.

Emilia: "Anyways, how about we enter a shop somewhere? Since Subaru and I will turn into blocks of sand at this rate."

What Emilia pointed towards while swiping away the sand that clung onto her, a the building at the other side of the road. A place that appeared to be a bar or something of sort, it seemed to be a temporary refuge shelter. It felt like the other stores were refusing visitors, but the entrance to this one was open, at the very least.

They hurried over to that building just like Emilia had suggested. They removed as much dirt as they could from the door, and after that, they slowly entered the bar.

???: "…Welcome, you from the Sand Wind."

Upon entering the bar, the shopkeeper at the other side of the counter who was polishing a glass looked at them, and greeted them with a low voice. He sounded unwelcoming with his low voice, probably because, with a single glance, he had noticed that Subaru and Emilia were smeared with sand.

They did remove as much sand off themselves as they could, but there was still a huge amount sticking onto them. Although they did feel bad about it, they scattered the sand and set foot into the store.

Shopkeeper: “What would you like to order?”

Emilia & Subaru: “Cold milk.” / “Hot milk.”

Shopkeeper: “————”

In response to the two people who sat down at the counter and said their orders, the shopkeeper squinted his eyes but remained silent. Incidentally, Subaru had ordered cold milk, while Emilia had ordered hot milk.

Subaru: “Doesn’t feel very prospering… Is business terrible during the Sand Time?”

Subaru took off the hood he covered himself with, and asked a question of the shopkeeper while tasting the milk he had been brought. The unsociable shopkeeper responded with an “Ahh”, before continuing,

Shopkeeper: “Even at the best of times, very few outsiders come and go, at this town. Running a shop during sunrise is just like a hobby.”

Subaru: “I see. Then as outsiders and customers we must be regulars, eh?”

Shopkeeper: “You can’t just go to a bar, ask for milk and act all proud. Here, this is yours, Miss.”

Emilia: “Oh, thanks.”

The shopkeeper held out the hot milk to her. Emilia grabbed onto the ceramic and took a breath. Subaru bent forward onto the counter, gazing at the girl blowing on the milk.

Subaru: “There’s no other customers, so do you have a little free time now right? Mind hearing me out for a bit?”

Shopkeeper: “Even if I did, it’s taboo to start talking to someone in the middle of working while, saying that they have time… What would you outsiders like to know?”

Subaru: “I’d like to know about the Augria Sand Dunes.”

With his finger raised, Subaru thrusted an enquiry to the shopkeeper. Once he had heard it however, the shopkeeper had his expression collapse for the first time.

The rough shopkeeper with short gray hair squinted the eyes under his dark eyebrows in suspicion. After that, he sized up Subaru and Emilia and let out a slight sigh.

Shopkeeper: “I don’t know what kind of joke this is, but don’t bother going if you’re gonna treat it like a picnic. You’ll just end up dying.”

Subaru: “Hey hey, what are you saying? Do we really look like we’re fooling around to you?”

Shopkeeper: “What else did my warning just now seem to you? That place is a sand sea of death , everyone who goes there never comes back, and dies. It’s not a place to have a date with a woman.”

Subaru: “I certainly do think that the suspension bridge effect is a valid approach, but I’m not that cornered. Emilia-tan, you tell him too.”

Emilia: “Fuu~ fuu~, hothot… Eh? What was that? Sorry, I wasn’t listening.”

Subaru: “Behold, the ways of EMT.”

Shopkeeper: “I’m gonna give you some useful advice. Go home before you die.”

Witnessing Subaru and Emilia’s interactions, the faith the shopkeeper had in the two got worse and worse.

That being said, it was not like the shopkeeper was saying this out of spite. He actually did know about the danger of the Augria Sand Dunes from its reputation. However——

Subaru: “We don’t have the option to retreat. We only have the path to move forward and on top of that, the only thing we can do is pick the safest path possible. You understand, right?”

Shopkeeper: “You’re the ones who don’t understand. Listen up. Those sand dunes are hopeless. The Witch’s Miasma drifts about in the Witchbeast Den, and you can’t get close to that tower you see faraway.”

The shopkeeper began speaking of the threats of the Sand Dunes, while Subaru's persistent behavior began to irritate him. Pointing at the window that was closed to prevent the sand from coming in, towards the east side of the town, he curled his lips.

Shopkeeper: "Every year there are people like you guys who make a reckless attempt at the sand dunes. They aim for the Sage's tower at the sand sea… but no one has ever reached it. They'd be lucky to come back alive, but the majority either end up drying up at the sand sea, or they become Witchbeast food."

Subaru: "Has no one really reached it before?"

Shopkeeper: "I believe the sand sea's tower was built hundreds of years ago. The number of idiots that have tried to go there hasn't decreased. If a person did reach it, there'd be no way they wouldn't come forward and boast of it. Don't you know? That even the Sword Saint failed that achievement."

Subaru: "————"

Even Reinhard had failed the challenge to conquer the Pleiades Watchtower. Reinhard himself had conveyed him that tale, and he had also mentioned the abnormally high difficulty of conquering the Watchtower.

But even then, the people who had to overcome it were Subaru's current group.

Subaru: "Of course, we won't do something stupid like tackling it without any plans. That's why we're gathering information. Doing that in a bar is a basic step, don't you think?"

Shopkeeper: "Is it really? Why do it at a place where you drink alcohol?"

Subaru: "If you ask me to explain in detail, I probably can't, but isn't it because everyone gets talkative after drinking alcohol, and then they'll end up pouring out various rumors?"

Shopkeeper: "So basically, you're looking for drunken ramblings. It's unacceptable to go in there without any plans, but leaning towards stupid plans is bad too."

Subaru: "Guehh! Your sound argument is piercing!"

Subaru got knocked down head-on by the truth and promptly sunk as he ingested his milk.

Usually whenever Subaru talked with proper adults, his normal conversational pace would be overwhelmed. The shopkeeper also was used to talking to people like Subaru, with the goal of challenging the sand dunes recklessly. As a matter of fact, it wasn't as if Subaru's challenging of the sand dunes was reckless, but the shopkeeper did not know the reality of the situation, and as such, he would be treated the same way.

At this rate, they would end up returning without gaining a single clue and——

Shopkeeper: "Anyways, for you to even bring a girl to a hell like that is…"

Emilia: "Sorry, Shopkeeper-san. You've been showing care for us, and yet Subaru is doing nothing but complaining."

Just when Subaru was about to give in to the stalemate, Emilia stopped the shopkeeper, his sermon about to begin. The shopkeeper widened his eyes at Emilia's words that had been prefaced with an apology.

With the shopkeeper like that, Emilia quickly bowed her head.

Emilia: "Thank you for all the help you've given us, even though we aren't even acquaintances."

Shopkeeper: "I'm sorry too for nagging. However, I don't think I've said anything wrong. I come across youngsters like you constantly."

Emilia: "Are there really that many people that have tried to see the Sage?"

Shopkeeper: "Well, there's really not that many people with will strong enough to meet the Sage. The majority of people trying to conquer the Augria Sand Dunes just want the honor. Sure, there are people who say they'll obtain wisdom from the Sage given that things go well, but the idea that they'll get a reward if they make it to tower is a bit of a stretch."

The shopkeeper dropped his shoulders and sighed with what you could call a fed-up look.

Just like he had stated, he had probably seen off many people who had gone to challenge Pleiades Watchtower. Perhaps he looked kind-hearted even with how his face looked, something that brought him shame.

Emilia: “Does that also mean that people haven’t met the Sage…?”

Shopkeeper: “Never heard of anyone getting that far. According to rumors, the Sage is still watching for anything below, in the dunes, from the top of the tower, punishing insolent people… But it’s not like I’ve witnessed it. I can’t help thinking that the sand dunes themselves are a bait, a trap for hunting prey.”

Emilia: “You mentioned the Witch’s Miasma. What is that?”

Shopkeeper: “It’s as I said. There is a Witchbeast Den … All over the Kingdom, you’ve got all shapes and sizes of Witchbeasts. But, those sand dunes are a special case with all sorts of beasts.”

The shopkeeper quietened his voice, yet he was talkative, perhaps getting carried away with the fun.

When Emilia gulped and nodded, the shopkeeper’s gaze turned distant.

Shopkeeper: “Spotted Rex and Blackwinged Mice have their charm. Unicorns and Sand Earthworms are endemic species, only seen here. Also, if you find a flower garden on the sandy soil, that’s a Courtesan Bear’s hunting place. Think of it as a nightmare.”

Emilia: “Courtesan Bear…”

Shopkeeper: “It seems that they’re only found at Kararagi. They’re Witchbeasts that have bloomed flowers all throughout their body. Once you are fooled by their appearance and approach them, they’ll slurp on your guts.”

Subaru: “As expected, Witchbeasts sure are… nasty…”

Who was it that had informed him that Witchbeasts had the purpose of killing humans?

The shopkeeper snorted his nose at Subaru, the latter frowning while listening attentively, as if saying “Told you so”.

Shopkeeper: “But the danger you must watch out for the most, even more than the Witchbeasts, is the Miasma. Yes, there are dangers like the Sand Wind and the changes in environment, but your biggest concern should be the Miasma.”

Subaru: “That Miasma doesn’t seem makes sense to me.”

Subaru titled his head towards the shopkeeper, who had lost his voice again.

Subaru heard the word “Miasma” many times before, and he could even imagine what it was like based off the impression the word gave off. Basically, it was bad air, which had bad effects on mind and body alike.

He felt like it was different from a noxious gas, but perhaps it was something akin to it.

Emilia: “Hmmm, Subaru. If described, Miasma is sort of like Mana that was polluted by bad things. You can’t see it, but it’s something that’s everywhere, don’t you know?”

Subaru: “Eh, so Mana is Miasma?”

He was surprised at what Emilia had pointed out. The explanation was easy to understand, but the implications were a bit different from what Subaru had imagined.

Mana truly did influence magic users and Spirits alike to an extreme degree. However, he’d thought that it would not pose much of an issue for just existing, or moving about atop a dragon.

But, as if she could see through Subaru’s disappointed inner thought, Emilia slowly shook her head.

Emilia: “You can’t take Miasma lightly. Normal Mana is something that’s pure, has no color and no directivity. But Miasma… Mana that has been polluted by bad things can be absorbed via the Gate, and can corrupt creatures from the insude. Considering how gate is an organ that naturally takes in Mana, that’s something that can’t be avoided.”

Subaru: “Can’t have your breathing stop for good, after all.”

Shopkeeper: “The lady’s interpretation is correct, but the Miasma drifting about at the Augria Sand Dunes is even worse—— The Miasma over there ruins not only living being, but also food and.”

Subaru: “You mean food becomes inedible?”

Shopkeeper: “I mean that once you eat it, the Miasma’s pollution will progress fast. You’ll go crazy just from taking even a little bit of it through your Gate. Try taking it in directly through your stomach. The pollution will swallow you whole.”

Subaru: “What happens then? It won’t stop just because I’ve gone insane?”

Shopkeeper: “People commonly say that you’ll die from madness. To tell you the truth… Well, I can’t deny it.”

The shopkeeper spoke succinctly, shaking his head. His complexion was terrible.

He had probably seen it before, although he was not relating it directly. He had seen people’s last moments, being violated by the Miasma and going crazy as a result, arriving at their death.

Shopkeeper: “It’d be far better for you guys to not go over there. Do that.”

Emilia: “——Thank you for the milk. Thanks for the talk too.”

Emilia gobbled up her hot milk and expressed her gratitude towards the shopkeeper, who had concluded the conversation.

The shopkeeper was probably aware of how they had begun prying out information from his conversation halfway through. To pile on further, he had also continued to speak until now, attempting to change Subaru and the others’ plans.

He simply felt sad for them. But even then, Subaru and the others would still go towards the same place.

Emilia: “I’ve paid. Subaru, let’s go.”

Subaru: “Hmm… let’s go then.”

Pulling onto Subaru’s sleeve, Emilia placed some silver coins onto the counter. She had given him way too much for two cups of milk, but it did also include a tip for the information and his care.

They got up, conveyed their thanks to the shopkeeper, and moved to exit the shop.

Shopkeeper: “——For about a year now, people have noticed there are birds flying towards the sand dunes.”

Emilia & Subaru: “————”

They covered themselves with their robes again, preparing themselves for the Sand Wind, and a voice called out to them from behind. When they turned back, the shopkeeper had already turned his own back, and continued speaking as if having a monologue while wiping a glass.

Shopkeeper: “The people that saw them say that the birds are flying towards the tower, and it spread as a joke. It’s a story without any legs to stand on, but…”

That, was when the shopkeeper cut his sentence and put down the glass. And then,

Shopkeeper: “If you ever become lost in the sand dunes, try looking for a bird. If you’re lucky, it might lead you towards the tower.”

Emilia & Subaru: “————”

Shopkeeper: “Though, if you’re lost amidst the sand dunes, your luck is already at its worst.”

Subaru and Emilia left the shop without replying to the Shopkeeper’s words.

Upon going outside, they noticed that the Sand Wind was now considerably weak. Emilia looked back at Subaru, confirming that her vision was now better to some extent in comparison to the time they entered the bar.

Emilia: “For now, let’s return to the inn and meet up with everyone else. Anastasia and the others might also be back now.”

Subaru: “Yeah, sounds good. I’m also interested in the results they’ve obtained too.”

Standing in front of Emilia, who had covered her face again, he began walking while posing as a windbreaker.

And then, once they reached a point where they could no longer see the bar, Emilia murmured quietly.

Emilia: “The person from the store just now was missing a leg.”

Subaru: “…I didn’t notice.”

Emilia: “I don’t know where he was injured… But I wonder if it was because of *that*.”

Subaru could perceive what Emilia wanted to say from her thoughtful words.

The shopkeeper had nicely and warmly expressed his strong feelings on the dangers of the sand dunes to the two strangers.

If that was indeed a warning based off his experiences, then they were terrible people to have shaken off that care and head towards the dunes nonetheless. That was what he felt.

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???: “Looks like Natsuki-kun and Emilia-san’ve returned safely.”

They had returned to the inn. The person that greeted Subaru and Emilia was someone who should have been outside, just like they had been. Anastasia.

She had changed from her outside clothes, a gorgeous and elegant smile on her face as she sat down on the bed.

The inn the group was staying at was a first-class inn at Mirula.

It was still unfair to compare it to Pristella’s Water Plumage Inn, but there was no other reasoning other than the qualitative difference between both cities.

Subaru: “Where’s Julius?”

Anastasia: “After droppin’ us off at the inn, he said he was gonna take a look ‘round the town for a bit. Perhaps he’s getting’ used to havin’ sand in his eyes. Just like Natsuki-kun. How was it?”

Subaru: “I really do wish we had goggles to protect against dust. They’re made of transparent glass, and they cover this part of the face as protection. Can’t we make some of those?”

Thinking of underwater goggles, Subaru asked while pointing to the area around his eyes. Anastasia tilted her head at those words and voiced an “I see” as she nodded.

Anastasia: “We’d have to worry ‘bout things like glasswork and durability, but it’s somethin’ worth considering… perhaps. The Sand Wind problem ain’t a matter unrelated to Kararagi, so it might be a useful idea.”

Subaru: “I’m not talking about patents far into the future. If we don’t have those things… Well, as long as we avoid Sand Time, I don’t think we’ll be incapacitated.”

Emilia: “It seems like the bigger concerns are the Witchbeasts and the Miasma, as opposed to the sand. Beatrice and I can try dealing with the Miasma with Micro Spirits… but we’ll have to depend on Meili for the Witchbeasts.”

Emilia said those words, and looked towards the room next door, which laid on the other side of the wall.

Right now, Beatrice should be monitoring Meili in that room. He wanted to be sentimental and believe Meili would not betray them, but a previous offense was a previous offense. They could not trust her, and they could not state with complete confidence that her connection with her mother had been cut. Likewise, there was no guarantee that her mother would not attempt to silence her.

Subaru: “So we’ll be relying on Anastasia to guide us. It’s pretty risky.”

Emilia: “Although it’d be valid to call it the usual.”

Subaru: “You’re not wrong.”

Subaru loosened his lips at Emilia’s rare interruption and then looked at Anastasia. She straightened her back while still on the bed, and continued the conversation by saying “But well”.

Anastasia: “Don’t’cha worry, we’ve fulfilled the purpose of our trip. The dragon carriage’s wheel adjustments ‘n the way to enter the sand dunes should be as we requested.”

Emilia: “Right… Sorry. We’re somewhat having you do everything.”

Anastasia: “It’s aight, it’s aight, since in return, we’ll be countin’ on Emilia-san when it comes to fightin’ power.”

Anastasia calmly waved her hand.

The goals she had spoken of—— one of them was tuning the dragon carriage they'd enter the sand dunes with. Usually, dragon carriages would only travel along a well-maintained road, or at least, a road. However, the road this time was mostly a sand road, so an ordinary dragon carriage would be unable to move properly.

Ditching the dragon carriage and riding the dragons would have been a good choice—— were there not many women and children. Considering how there was also Rem, unconscious, the option was not viable.

Thus, it was necessary to adjust the dragon carriage to suit it for desert areas, and it was also necessary to make some changes to the ground dragons.

Subaru: "Can't leave Patrasche behind. Leaving her behind would be ridiculous."

Emilia: "That girl is reaaally smart. If he told her she'd be left behind, she might bite Subaru…"

That actually could happen, so he could not give a response. Plus, he was unable to leave her behind.

Emilia: "So, other than the dragons, about the discussion …"

Anastasia: "It was no discussion, really. All I did was try to placate their fears 'n make 'em listen to me."

She showed an adorable smile, but, sensing that it was not what it seemed, Subaru's back began to get some chills.

There was the dragon carriage and another matter to be taken care of. Simply put, it was the rite of passage to deal with the sand dunes. That was, if the Royal Candidates Emilia and Anastasia were lost in the Augria Sand Dunes, who would be responsible?

As of now, it was possible to say that these two held the most important position in the Kingdom. If both were buried under the Augria Sand Dunes, it would be quite a big deal, and naturally there would be confusion over the person responsible.

The Augria Sand Dunes—— never mind the one who managed the sand dunes themselves, the weight of responsibility would be unbearable for the Lord that governed the area around Mirula, their last stop.

Thus, Anastasia had gone to write a letter to the Lord beforehand to convince them with "No matter what happens, it's the Candidate's own responsibility".

Anastasia: “But still, they might be blamed for not stoppin’ me… our lives ain’t just our own. It’s a big responsibility, don’t’cha think?”

Emilia: “That’s been true from the start. Not because of things like the Royal Selection or being a Candidate, but there will be a lot of people that won’t be saved if we don’t meet the Sage and find a way to get those things back. It’s not something that has come up now.”

Anastasia: “Ya sure are being as dependable as ya can.”

Anastasia looked back at Emilia, who had declared so, in what appeared to be a happy way in some respects. After that, she tilted her head, looking at Subaru with a “So,”.

Anastasia: “Did’cha guys get any results from yer stroll? There’s no way ya guys actually went out to simply get used to havin’ sand in your eyes, right?”

Subaru: “Well, it’s not like we went out on a date in the middle of Sand Wind. We got the chance to listen to someone informed for a little bit.”

Emilia: “The store person being informed was just a coincidence, though.”

Subaru: “My foresight is on point for choosing that bar.”

Emilia: “I have a feeling that I was the one who chose the shop…”

Anyhow, whatever the flow of events was and whose achievement it was, were both irrelevant. Anastasia had a pondering look after they had finished telling her about the bar.

Anastasia: “Catchin’ sight of a bird… Hmm.”

Subaru: “Really, that’s what you’re curious about?”

Anastasia: “Well, the other parts are just things like challengin’ the Augria Sand Dunes ‘n stuff that’s just half-a-step up from common knowledge. Anyways, the very interesting part is that change. Stuff like birds oughta be the most sensitive to wind mixed with Miasma.”

Emilia: “Now that you say it, that’s right…”

In response to Anastasia's words, Emilia went into deep thought while caressing her hair. Glancing sideways at Emilia pondering, Subaru gently brought his face close to Anastasia.

Subaru: "——There's no way you actually do have something in mind, right?"

Anastasia: "Nothing special's come to mind. However, that really was somethin' very interesting to me."

Subaru: "————"

Anastasia: "Don't make such a doubtful face. Look, she'll get suspicious."

He could see Eridna's true feelings on her face slightly, but he had no choice but to withdraw after she had pointed that out. Fortunately, Emilia had not seen the interaction just now as she was in deep thought, but for some reason, in Subaru's heart, it felt like he was an adulterer frantically hiding his cheating.

Subaru: "When should we leave?"

Anastasia: "The sooner the better, right? The worryin' conversation about the dragon carriage's been settled already… Perhaps we should leave immediately after we've loaded on supplies again."

Subaru: "Tomorrow would be too quick, how about around the day after?"

Anastasia: "Guess we'll go with that."

When Anastasia voiced her agreement, Emilia also gave an acknowledging nod. After that, she directed her gaze towards the room's window, that had been shut tight as to keep the sand out, squinted her eyes.

What Emilia's amethyst eyes were looking at, was the view of the east, on the other side of the window.

A very long shadow, standing conspicuously tall, its height taller than the stores and houses on the streets, was present there.

Emilia: "The Pleiades Watchtower."

A voice like a silver bell called upon the building's name.

The tower that was their destination was so high that it could be seen from Mirula.

——Was it even possible to lose track of something that big?

Before they had even set foot in Mirula, with the appearance of the Pleiades Watchtower during their journey, that question had been present in Subaru.

What could have gone wrong, to not be able to find such a large landmark?

But, on the other hand, as he thought that, the bartender's warning also pierced him.

Subaru: "Having no plans is out of the question, and a stupid plan is a poor plan, was it?"

Whatever the case, they did not have the option to back out from the challenge.

That was exactly why they had chosen the means that would increase their chances, means that were available to them. They should be different from the adventurers the shopkeeper spoke of, unprepared with their stupid plans. That was what he believed.

And that was why Subaru did not realize it. And he would not realize it.

——Whatever the case, they did not have the option to back out from the challenge.

He did not notice that, at this point, he had already closed off the first path for himself.

Arc 6 Chapter 8 – Baptism of the Sand Dunes

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 2 “Overcome Sand Time!”, Parts 3-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

——The morning of their departure had arrived.

One day had been allocated for rest, and it was now two days after the prior arrangements and the information gathering.

At the entrance to the town of Mirula, Subaru and the others had gathered with their respective equipment on, having finished their preparations to cross the Sand Dunes with their respective equipment on. Gazing at the dragon carriage, Subaru let out a sigh of admirable

Subaru: “Wow, this is…”

Julius: “A ground dragon to cross the Sand Dunes——the Gyras species is a species that shines on sandy soil. Their species is adapted to Sand Wind and dryness alike, characterized by large figures and gentle demeanor. You will find that this endemic species has an easy-to-handle nature.”

As Subaru looked at the ground dragons tied to the dragon carriage with eyes widened, Julius added an explanation.

They had to break through the Augria Sand Dunes, so that they could reach Pleiades Watchtower. The legs of a typical ground dragon would not be capable of dealing with the difficulty of treading that path filled with sand.

Therefore, they had exchanged the ground dragons that had brought them this far via the road, and now would have to use the Gyras species of ground dragons, endemic to this land, to carve open a path.

Subaru: “Endemic, huh. There were water dragons in Pristella too, but wow, the world is big.”

Folding his arms, Subaru gazed at the yellow-skinned ground dragon connected to the dragon carriage right in front of him.

Subaru had already spent more than a year in this world. His initial surprise towards the ground dragons had faded, and thought he would never again feel a breed of excitement similar to what he had felt at first, but he'd been too narrow-minded.

Subaru: "————"

A yellow ground dragon, with thorn-like scales all over its body, its head flat. They had a physique similar to Otto's beloved dragon Frufoo, which was of a species with excellent stamina even among ground dragon; its owner had boasted that it was capable of travelling for three days and three nights. It would perhaps be similar to the triceratops that Subaru knew.

On the other hand, attempting to compare the ground dragon in front of him to similar knowledge would have a person find them rather resembling an ankylosaurus. However, their tails were short, so it seemed like their tails could not be used as weapons, unlike the original's. Also, what was more characteristic of them, more so than their skin and general looks, were their feet. ——Every end of their four thick, short legs were round, and their sharp claws acted like spikes which moored their bulking bodies to the ground.

Subaru: "It sure does look like their hooves can cause unrecoverable damage to anything they step on."

Julius: "The grains found in the Augria Sand Dunes are fine particles. Without feet like this, there would be the possibility of slipping off slopes. People say that the Gyras species' feet changed to adapt to that."

Subaru: "So they adapted to the desert areas, eh. They are replacements for horses and camels, but what about water dragons? Thinking hard about it, it's not like I've seen animals pull boats back at the original world."

He went into deep thought and a swan boat came to Subaru's mind, but that was just a boat imitating the form of a swan, and ran on man-made power. However, he'd never heard of a custom in which crocodiles or hippopotamuses pulled on boats, so he couldn't think of any replacement for water dragons. Even beyond that——

Subaru: “These dragons adapted to sandy soil are going there, but can we really bring my Patrasche to a place like that? Can’t do anything unreasonable with the lady of the camp.”

Julius: “Your beloved dragon belongs to the Diana species, which is considered the ancestor of all ground dragons. The founding forefather dragon, dominant on land, sea, and air is present in her lineage… It has excellent adaptability, no matter what the environment is. Unfortunately, my Shaknar will be left at the town.”

Julius answered Subaru’s question, then looked upwards towards the inn with lonesomeness.

Shaknar was Julius’ beloved, beautiful blue-skinned ground dragon.

It was a loving dragon, but it had forgotten about Julius, who had had his name eaten by Gluttony. However, this well-trained dragon would be polite to anyone that rode it, at all times. Even at their one-sided meeting at Pristella, it had been accepting of Julius from the beginning, and it seemed that during this trip that had lasted about a month and a half[15], an intimate bond much like the one from before had been formed.

For that very reason, he had what you could call feelings of shame for leaving that beloved dragon at the town.

Julius: “Nevertheless, for your beloved dragon to be the lady you use the most out of all the people around you… I do not know if I should praise you for knowing how to use your ground dragon, or if I should complain about your evaluation of the women around you.”

Subaru: “…Actually, you shouldn’t make light of how high Patrasche’s girl power is.”

Julius had an emotional look for a second, so he immediately covered up his feelings with some banter. Subaru also sensed those thoughts of his and went along with it.

Seeing that, Julius went to greet the ground dragon of the dragon carriage whose reins he would be holding. As a response, Subaru looked towards the dragon carriage, stepped towards it, and knocked on the door.

[15] No, this is not a translation mistake. Despite it being stated it’d been a month since Priestella earlier, here it’s a month and a half (一ヶ月半).

Subaru: “So the inside of the dragon carriage will be left as-is, but the wheels have been replaced and…”

Subaru inspected the remodeled dragon carriage before there was an answer to his knock.

Having said that, the changes that stood out were in the carriage’s inferior structure—— the wheels, and the window frames had installed with sand protection for the Sand Wind.

This dragon carriage, which had been devised for long-distance journeys, was something like an RV with its multipurpose features. Inside and at the front of the carriage, there was a row of seats, and the middle and backsides were exceptionally good to simply chill.

On top of it ensuring comfort, it could hold up to ten people at max. Subaru was honestly surprised by how the dragon carriage easily surpassed his expectations on first sight.

Subaru: “Without electricity and electrical appliances, those tools can be replaced with magic stones. Humans really are creatures that seek convenience anywhere.”

???: “——I do not know what you are talking about so seriously, but are the preparations finished, Barusu?”

While he was puzzled at the exterior, the dragon carriage’s door opened, and a cold voice poured down at the same time.

Turning around, there was Ram, standing up from the seat closest to the door, looking down on Subaru.

Subaru: “Well, the previous preparations were finished yesterday, so it’s ready. Next, we’ve got to prepare our hearts and bodies, but I’m also done with that. How about you?”

Ram: “Let’s see. Considering how many days we will be in this carriage, no amount of care will quell this feeling of lack of safety. Ram will not cry for help as a delicate person in the middle of the sand dunes, even if attacked.”

Subaru: “——It’ll be fine, don’t worry.”

With Ram narrowing her eyes meaningfully, Emilia then made her appearance having heard them talk. Emilia seemed to have been tidying up the back of the dragon carriage. She then stepped up to Ram’s side, tapping on her shoulder.

Emilia: “No matter what attacks us, I’ll protect everyone in here. There’s Subaru and Julius outside too, so we’ve got everything covered.”

Subaru: “You are as reassuring as always. See, look, Ram. Emilia-tan is saying this too, so don’t worry.”

Ram: “Yes, Emilia-sama. Ram is very reassured as well. However, it will not be just malicious beings that will attack us. Among us there are also those with evil intentions…”

Ram spoke meaningful words, while directing a meaningful look at Subaru.

Once Subaru understood Ram’s look and the underlying meaning of her words, he frowned immediately.

Subaru: “You’re still doubting me like that, even after spending close to one month of peaceful nights!? There’s no way I can do something like that with you around! I don’t have that type of courage!”

Ram: “It is pathetic how you are insisting that with a loud voice, it is not unthinkable for you to lose control of yourself because of how beautiful it is in this carriage. Ram is always afraid. Sympathize with a maiden’s heart.”

Subaru: “Always afraid? Not always threatening people?”

Ram basically repeating the saying that boys and girls should be separated once they turned seven, had caused Subaru’s voice to shake. Incidentally, Emilia did nothing but tilt her head in confusion.

It was Emilia’s usual EMTness, and Ram’s insolence. However, as there was something bothering him, Subaru scratched his head unenergetically with an “Ah”,

Subaru: “Nee-sama, how’s your physical condition?”

Ram: “…Weird of you to ask that. Why do you wonder?”

Subaru: “Your worry is unnecessary, but is mine unnecessary? I just want to know the answer to that.”

Ram: “Barusu, you sure are cheeky with how attentive you are.”

She did not have a pale face, and it did not seem like she was having trouble breathing, and albeit Ram appeared to be acting like her usual self, she had not denied Subaru’s words.

She did not act tough, nor had she attempted to hide it. In that sense, Ram was being surprisingly sincere.

Subaru: “Looks like your wicked tongue doesn’t have its usual sharpness. If your body’s condition really is bad, then…”

Ram: “After having spent twenty days to reach this place, you expect me to stomp my feet with the objective at hand? It is the same as usual, but today you are being particularly ridiculous.”

Emilia: “Ram, don’t speak like that.”

Ram interrupted Subaru, directing him an even fiercer look. Emilia raised her eyebrows at that girl’s behavior, putting hands on her hips like she was angry.

Standing next to Ram, she pointed her hand towards Subaru while being next to Ram and spoke,

Emilia: “Subaru is worried about Ram. I’m also worried about you. Everyday I’m giving the treatment Roswaal told me about, but…”

Subaru: “Still unsure if you can call it treament, but it’s not like it’s your specialty. Even if Emilia-tan and Beako both do it, they can’t do it as well as Roswaal.”

Ram: “…Not trying to use that as a reason. I do not want to be a bother.”

Subaru: “We are worried, you know?”

Ram: “If you were the usual Barusu, then I could fool you.”

Subaru: “You aren’t the usual Ram, so you can’t fool me.”

They weren’t inflammatory tit-for-tat words, nor were they comebacks.

Anyhow, there was a quiet exchange of words, and Ram bit her lips in a seemingly displeased way at the way Subaru spoke. However, there was a lack of vigor in the eyes she stared at him with.

She probably was aware of it herself. Ram let out a sigh and looked inside of the carriage. There was a wheelchair right next to her seat, a single girl placed on it.

The space had been remodeled to allow the wheelchair to be placed there, by removing the dragon carriage's seat. Their interactions did not disturb the sleeping girl, and so she remained there, in slumber.

Ram: "I shall not be left behind. Also, not like my pain will improve if I do get left behind. Actually, being separated from Emilia-sama with how I am now would put my life at risk. You trying to kill me?"

Subaru: "Calm down. I've never even said a single word about leaving you behind since the beginning. Also, if you were to be left behind, Emilia-tan would be too."

Emilia: "Hmph! Subaru, there's no way I'd let that happen."

Subaru: "Liiiike I saaaaid, it's fine! I just want to check on Ram!"

Emilia: "What do you want to check?"

Subaru: "Didn't I say it…?"

Subaru gave a wry smile, as his earlier words had been forgotten because they had repeatedly jumped to conclusions. Seeing Emilia and Ram exchanging doubtful glances, Subaru continued,

Subaru: "Ram. We can tell that you aren't your usual self, so if there's something wrong, say something. Don't try to hide stuff and fool us. Even if you do stuff like that, we'll still help you, even if you don't like it."

Ram: "————"

Emilia: "Hehe."

After he pointed his finger at Ram and affirmed that, Ram made a rare look of shame.

Emilia put her hand on her mouth at her side, and let out a smile unintentionally, unable to contain. That first urge to laugh however was warded off, and Emilia merely relaxed her lips, looking pleased.

Emilia: "I think that side of Subaru is reaaally nice."

Subaru: "…Eh!? Did you just fall in love again!?"

Ram: “Don’t talk like that with Rem sleeping in front of you, women’s harmful enemy.”

Subaru: “Women’s harmful enemy, not just women’s enemy!?”

Ram snorted her nose with a “Haa”, prompting Subaru’s voice to trail off into the distance.

After that, stretching her slender legs, and she recklessly tried to kick Subaru off of the dragon carriage’s steps.

Subaru: “Oh, h-hey! What are you doing, I’m going to fall!”

Ram: “Putting aside you falling, Barusu should normally be outside, not inside. Mount the prideful ground dragon, and frantically guarantee our dragon carriage’s safety. Do it, quickly.”

Subaru: “What do you mean quickly, listen to what I have to…”

Ram: “——I have listened to what I must. So, go.”

Ram asserted with an even sterner voice, and delivered an even sharper kick.

Having gotten a punt to the thigh, Subaru descended in dejection, and just before he went away from the dragon carriage, looks were exchanged with Emilia. She responded to that look by giving an acknowledging gesture with her chin, which had an “I know” underlying.

Subaru: “Guess that’ll be fine for now. But, anyways you should… Gah.”

Ram: “Go.”

A kick that felt like a surprise attack connected with his solar plexus, and Subaru fell off the dragon. Then, Ram hurriedly shut the carriage’s door, suddenly looked at Emilia as she let out a sigh. Then she spoke,

Ram: “…Emilia-sama, why are you making that look?”

Emilia: “No, it’s nothing. But, I just thought about how you’re kind of cute.”

Ram: “That’s a surprising opinion. How cheeky of Emilia-sama.”

Emilia: “Hmm.”

Due to being teased Ram’s tongue slipped, eliciting a rare sight of her cheeks being stiffened to be seen. Emilia witnessed that change in Ram’s facial expression and smiled, appearing to become more and more happy.

Emilia: “Finally feel like showing that face to me too, the one you always show to Subaru?”

Ram: “…It was a slip of mind. Please forgive my impoliteness.”

Emilia: “I’m not really angry. I’m actually a little happy, it somewhat feels like you’re giving me trust when you do that. I was a little jealous of Subaru.”

Ram kept silent for a bit in response to Emilia’s innocent reply. Immediately after that, with a dumbfounded look while smoothing her hair, Ram——

Ram: “Emilia-sama, you have changed as well. When we first met, you only seemed like someone with resolve that was hard, but fragile, like glass.

Emilia: “Do I look a little stronger now?”

Ram: “And now, I think… You are like sweet glass turned into candy.”

Emilia: “Wow, Ram, you’re harsh.”

Emilia was smacked by Ram’s abusive words, and her voice finally boomed from being unable to bear it.

And in that manner, the girls resumed talking with each other inside the dragon carriage.

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——After a few hours, the conquer of the Augria Sand Dunes began.

They had become acquainted with the sandy soil after one hour in the dragon carriage; they were approximately ten kilometers east of the town of Mirula. With the dry sand and Miasma-laden wind

growing stronger, and the prairie at their feet changing to desert, they had finally entered the Augria Sand Dunes proper.

???: "_____"

Their setup was made up of one dragon carriage, and a ground dragon of the Gyras species to pull it. Running off to the side, was Subaru riding Patrasche, trekking along the sandy soil.

The flat-faced ground dragon wasn't fast, but its heavy pacing gave off a feeling of stability. At first, Patrasche had seemed wary of her weird companion, but after a few hours of traveling together, it was as if she'd found a compromise with her partner, and dissatisfaction was not to be found on her highly prideful face.

???: "If I had to describe it, then I'd probably say that the dissatisfaction of this ground dragon is because of Betty, in fact."

It was Beatrice, completely settled in Subaru's arms. While holding the bridle and onto the curled-up girl, Subaru said "No no" as he shook his head.

Subaru: "That's not right. Patrasche isn't such an intolerant dragon."

Beatrice: "…Subaru, it'd be wise of you to be more careful of how you perceive those around you, I suppose."

She let out those words, grabbing onto the edge of her skirt as she sat sideways on the jet-black ground dragon.

Subaru's dragon-riding skills were a lot better than they were before. Up to this point he had been simply spoiled by Patrasche's consideration, but now he was at the level of a dragon-rider apprentice.

He sat on the saddle and held onto the bridle. Beatrice was in front of him, and he made sure to hold onto her from behind; they almost looked like experts at riding together.

Of course, the only ground dragon Subaru would ride was Patrasche, and this wasn't the first time he rode her along with Beatrice. Thus, Beatrice was being too paranoid, no matter how he looked at it. That's what he wanted to say.

Beatrice: “Very prideful ground dragons don’t want to let anyone other than their owner ride them, in fact. This ground dragon of Subaru’s is extraordinary, one-of-a-kind, I suppose. If I were alone, she definitely wouldn’t let me ride her, in fact.”

Subaru: “Isn’t that just because you’re bad at riding ground dragons?”

Beatrice: “If that was the reason, then you getting close with this ground dragon wouldn’t make sense, I suppose.”

It was just as she’d said.

If Patrasche liked a person based on their dragon riding skills, then Subaru should’ve failed the first test. Since that had not come to pass, there was a reason as to why this lady approved of Subaru.

And, in truth, Patrasche’s actual treatment towards everyone but Subaru was relatively harsh.

Subaru: “Well, not knowing why you’re liked really is a bad thing.”

Beatrice: “True, in fact. Subaru doesn’t have the looks to be liked for no reason, I suppose.”

Subaru: “…In other words, you have firm reasons to love me.”

Beatrice: “Of course, Betty is… Just what are you trying to make me say!?”

They were glued together, so he couldn’t dodge Beatrice’s assault, her face beet red. While getting struck lightly by her weak palm, Subaru said “Whoa, whoa” in an attempt to appease Beatrice. Then, Patrasche raised her upper body and shook them, as if displeased with the behavior they were displaying on her back.

Subaru: “Oh, what the!?”

As she had set her posture in a way that was like doing a wheelie on a bike, Subaru reflexively held tight onto Beatrice.

Normally they would not feel any swaying from the dragon or even the wind because of the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion, but certain extreme movements like the one just now would have effect, as well as things like angle changes from sudden turning.

The harassment was based on an understanding of those characteristics.

When Subaru put in his objection and glared at the back of Patrasche's head, the ground dragon looked at Subaru and Beatrice for a second, squinting her eyes as if saying "You'll bite your tongue".

Subaru: "She's kinda like Ram just considering how haughty she is. Seems like they'd get along, surprisingly."

Beatrice: "Or maybe they'd clash with each other, and they wouldn't come to an agreement at all, I suppose."

Subaru and Beatrice exchanged deep thoughts and nodded at each other. Then,

???: "Subaru, Beatrice-sama. It is splendid seeing you guys being friendly with each other, but this would be a good time to put yourselves together in earnest."

A voice speaking out from the side was sent towards the two who acted relaxedly.

At the driver box of the dragon carriage travelling alongside them, there was Julius, in charge of the reins. Rather than the fact that he was not alone, it seemed that the role of coachman was unpleasant and not very fitting for Julius, but he didn't act like he cared about it.

That being said, perhaps he did not have the time to worry about that. Either way, at his side there was,

???: "I don't mind onii-san and Beatrice-chan being friendly with each other, but if I'm ignored too much, I'll pout."

Having stated those words, giving them a look that didn't fit her appearance—— Meili, sitting.

Meili was an essential member to deal with the Witchbeasts, and they would have to always use her for conquering the Augria Sand Dunes. Thus, as a lookout for the Witchbeasts living at the Sand Dunes, Meili was at the place where it would d be easiest for her to deal with them—— in other words, she was standing by at the driver box at the front of the dragon carriage.

Julius took up the role of staving off her boredom.

Subaru: “You have the Knight next to your side to escort you. He’s much more smart, stylish, and elegant than me.”

Meili: “I didn’t get more than half of what you’ve said. Plus, I’m fine with Knight-sama. I’m unhappy with Onii-san.”

Subaru: “With me?”

While playing with her braided hair, Meili glared at Subaru, her cheeks swollen in a pout.

Meili: “Onii-san made me come along, and so he must be forced to deal with me.”

Subaru: “Don’t say such unreasonable childish things. As you can see, that place is filled with Beako. Right?”

Beatrice appeared to shrugher shoulders in resentment, and Subaru looked at Meili again.

Pouting was a suitable action for her age, but her mood would have a big influence from now on down the road. Considering that, it would be bold to make light of Meili.

However, saying that really would make things unmanageable.

Subaru: “You’re quite right, however, we’ll have you fulfill your role first before you can say if it’s a right or a duty.”

Meili: “My role, hmm.”

Subaru: “We’ll be entering the most favorite Augria Sand Dunes soon. I don’t think the Witchbeasts will suddenly roar when we enter them, but when it does happen, calming them down will be up to you, Meili. You get that, right?”

Meili: “…Yeees. For someone who spoils Beatrice-chan, onii-san sure is a bully.”

He wasn’t being a bully to her, but even if he was taken as one, he would just have to cajole her.

Subaru felt like Beatrice seemed satisfied, looking at her with a side glance, and then raised his hand at Julius. After that, Jullius quietly acknowledged, gesturing with his chin.

Unfortunately for him, he would have to be the little lady's sycophant. Moreover——

Beatrice: "Subaru."

Subaru: "Ahh, I see it."

Beatrice called out to him quietly, while Patrasche gave a faint neigh, as she glared at what laid in front. Those actions brought back his focus, and Subaru squinted.

He saw the tower, its contours so clear that it would be impossible to miss them from Mirula—— likewise, surface of sand surrounding that tower was visible.

Their magnificent arrival to the maze of sand surrounding the Pleiades Watchtower, the Augria Sand Dunes.

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In the Augria Sand Dunes, there was a particularly famous Sand Time, in which the Sand Wind would blow particularly strong.

The Sand Wind that would blow three times a day, morning, afternoon, and night, would carry sand and Miasma from the east towards the west, a disaster that would silently creep on people. This Sand Wind would be especially strong in the midnight hour, and it would continue to blow for a few hours.

As it was pretty much midnight, so at this time when the Sand Wind blew, their movement would be stifled.

Thus, they would conquer the Augria Sand Dunes during the day, little-by-little, with a few hours of break in the morning and afternoon, at the times the Sand Times would blow.

The grains of sand that fully covered the ground were miniscule, and just like the rumors had stated, it was terribly difficult to keep their footing, causing them to trip. Their march was slow, slow as a crawl; an irritating situation all around.

There was something about that situation which disappointed Subaru. That was——

Subaru: “There’s the pain of this Sand Wind and the poor footing, but… it isn’t as bad as I thought.”

Turning his face away from the wind blowing from windward, he pulled up the mouth cloth to secure his breathing. He faintly felt his teeth biting the sand, but this type of baptism was not very different from his time at Mirula.

The flying sand created a view of yellow, and he felt the sand tickling him in his clothes, but that was as far as its effects went. The fury of the dunes was insignificant.

Subaru: “When I first heard about the dunes, I even prepared myself on the assumption that it’d be deathly.”

Beatrice: “It’s because of the natural environment that there’s nothing green in here, in fact. The Miasma kills anything and everything, so it only has this sort of scenery spread out, I suppose. That is why rain even pours on these sand dunes, and the temperature doesn’t go extremely out of control, in fact.”

Subaru had a strong impression of the desert being a red-hot hell. He’d never stepped foot into a desert back at his other world, but in mediums like games and manga, the deserts all yielded impressions of hot sand.

For that reason, the severity of the Augria Sand Dunes was pleasant, in comparison to what he had initially imagined.

Subaru: “It wasn’t hot or cold at the nearest town, so I guess it’d be weird for the sand dunes to be an extremely hot hell. So, we only need to be careful of the wind and the Witchbeasts.”

Beatrice: “As well as getting lost… I suppose.”

One worry had disappeared, and Beatrice stifled Subaru’s feelings of optimism to stiffen up. In response to the point made by the girl in his arms, Subaru looked forward while being careful of the wind.

The Watchtower, its existence ever-present, loomed still in Subaru’s line of sight.

Subaru: “You bring up the question of getting lost, but it seems unnatural to miss that thing.”

Beatrice: “Betty thinks so too, in fact. However, it wouldn’t surprising if something happened, I suppose. I don’t know what type of cheat this Sage is, but the fact that nobody has ever reached them is proof, in fact.”

Subaru: “————”

Of course, Subaru had no intentions of underestimating things.

Realistically speaking, it would be unlikely that they would miss their target considering it was a structure that huge, never mind getting lost. However, any prior challengers would have most likely thought the same thing.

Despite those thoughts in mind, he figured there should have been a reason as to why they had still not reached it.

Anything could happen. Just like Beatrice had pointed out, this was that sort of devilish place[16].

Subaru: “About that, I guess it’s about time we make the next backup.”

Holding his breath, Subaru looked back at the terrain they had just traversed.

On the sandy soil, the footsteps of Patrasche, on whom Subaru and Beatrice were riding, had been left behind, one-by-one. However, only the very latest ones would remain. And in time, too, they would be washed away, replaced, and hidden by the sand.

Nature itself had concocted such a natural trap.

Never mind the Watchtower at the front, the path they had traveled thus far would be hidden from them in eximious fashion.

However, that would only be true if these people were only able to take ordinary measures.

Subaru: “Seems like the previous one’s gone from sight. Alright, this is a good time.”

[16] The word used here has a bit of a pun (魔境), since “魔” can be read as both “devil”, like in “half-devil” (半魔), and “magic/magical” (魔女, this means “Witch”, or literally, “magic woman”).

Subaru pulled on the bridle, directing Patrasche to veer towards the dragon carriage running parallel to them.

The wheels of the dragon carriage also left traces, as did the ground dragon's spike-shaped footprints, but those were subjected to the same conditions as Patrasche's. Thus, they had to devise something as a marks to follow.

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, please!"

Emilia: "——Okaaaay, got it."

When he knocked on the dragon carriage from the outside, Emilia answered and showed up on the other side of the door.

Emilia's whole body had been covered with a white robe for the sand, and Subaru, behind her—— was gazing and pointing at something in the far distance, a certain "something" that was faintly reflected in his eyes,

Subaru: "I'm sorry for having you work so much, but please, Sensei!"

Emilia: "Well, I'm having Subaru watch from outside. It's not a big problem… What do you mean by «Sensei»?"

Subaru: "It's the template when a request is made. Alright, alright, alright, please."

Emilia: "Okay, I've been requested—— Hey!"

After that brief light-hearted exchange, she looked to the place Subaru was pointing towards. Emilia raised a listless shouting voice, the look in her eyes too cute to call a glare, and her magical power surged.

Immediately after, an enormous amount of Mana swirled in Emilia's palm, and the magical power dashed swiftly through the sky, giving off the sense that its power increased as it accelerated. The sound it produced was like the very air had exploded, and it resounded throughout the vicinity.

——And then, after a few seconds, a huge ice tower stood on the path of the sandy plain.

Emilia: “Yeah, that was good.”

Confirming that the task was finished, Emilia smiled, looking somewhat satisfied with herself.

It wasn’t comparable in size to the Pleiades Watchtower, but it was still a very conspicuous silhouette for the Augria Sand Dunes. And so, an ice tower had been erected here and there along the route Subaru and the others had taken inside the Augria Sand Dunes, in successive intervals such that they would not lose sight of the path.

Subaru: “The footprints can’t be marks, but marks can be made with a more conspicuous method. This is the application of magic, eh.”

Emilia: “Even so, Subaru’s craft is very impressive. Nice thinking.”

Subaru: “This method won’t be any good if the sand dunes were hot.”

The ice Emilia created with her magic was fragile to temperature, perhaps because it didn’t go against the laws of nature. Based off that knowledge, were this a genuine desert, then maybe such a forbidden move would not have worked. However, it was a valid plan in these Sand Dunes.

Emilia’s standing ice tower was functioning as a landmark without a hitch. Worst-case scenario, if something really did happen that would force them to withdraw, they should be able to follow them and retreat.

Subaru: “This tower… yeah, it looks alright underfoot. I’m still scared of it possibly toppling over, though. Since its foundation seems to be on something fluid.”

Emilia: “I think it’s been pinned to the ground as hard as possible, so it’s all hunky-dory. You’re worried?”

Subaru: “Who even says «hunky-dory» these days… Ahh, alright.”

Subaru put aside his worry by teasing Emilia, and raised his head. Emilia seemed a wee bit displeased with that response, but for the time being she would just put a sarcastic smile on her face.

After that, he looked over Emilia’s shoulder; towards the inside of the dragon carriage behind her. For everyone inside, it should be the same as usual, but there was one person that he would rather not see remaining the same.

Subaru: “Where’s Anastasia?”

???: “What is it, Natsuki-kun? Lookin’ for me?”

Immediately after his gazed had wandered, Subaru jumped upon being called by a person’s voice.

Cutting into his line of sight, Anastasia peeked out from a bit to the side of Emilia. She looked down on a surprised Subaru, her teal eyes squinted ever so slightly.

Anastasia: “No need to get startled that much. Ain’t I deliberately stayin’ inside?”

Subaru: “I know that you are inside, but it was shocking because I didn’t expect you to appear from Emilia’s armpit like you’re growing out of it.”

Emilia: “…Hey, Subaru. I reaaally didn’t like the way you said that.”

Anastasia: “Unusual for me too, to be annoyed by somethin’ like that. What a coincidence.”

With both Emilia and Anastasia showing some dislike, Subaru got back on track. There was Beatrice shrugging her shoulders in his arms, but he turned to Anastasia for now.

Subaru: “We’ll be relying on your knowledge to conquer the Sand Dunes. Please guide us well, okay?”

Anastasia: “Natsuki-kun sure is a worrywart. I’ll be with’cha, so the outcome of this journey’s the same for us two… There’s no way I’d try and cut corners, ya know? Don’t’cha worry.”

Beatrice: “…Is it possible for someone to believe a fox so nonchalantly, I suppose?”

Replying to Anastasia’s words, Beatrice spoke with a voice so low that it could only be heard by Subaru. He was in complete agreement, but it would be wrong to provoke her by using that basis.

If he was going to say that, then opting to go on this campaign towards the Watchtower would have been a mistake in the first place. As of now, they should be using up all their strength to fulfill their respective roles without complaining.

Subaru: “Right, Anastasia.”

Anastasia: “Yes, Natsuki-kun. If somethin’ happens, I’ll let Julius know, and once we come near the place Echidna spoke about, I’ll report that too. Don’t worry, yeah?”

Anastasia—— Or rather, Eridna, did not seem displeased by Subaru’s cynical beckoning. It seemed like there would be no problem moving forward like this, for the moment being.

Emilia: “It seems like the wind has gotten stronger. Subaru, if there’s nothing else, then I’m going to close it, but…”

Subaru: “…Ahh, go ahead. Emilia-tan, I’ll leave the people inside up to you.”

Emilia: “Yeah, leave it to me. Subaru, you be nice to Beatrice, too.”

Beatrice: “No need to worry about that, I suppose. I’m satisfied, in fact.”

Emilia put her hand on the door, and after an exchange words, she went back inside and left. Beatrice responded to Emilia’s last joke with a light remark, the latter’s smile disappeared, blocked by the door.

Subaru now went around to the front of the dragon carriage, appearing next to the driver’s box.

Julius: “It appears like Emilia-sama’s landmarks are working proper. You are as clever as always.”

Subaru: “You can call it guile, you know.”

Julius: “I shan’t. I am jealous of your adaptability, being able to come up with ideas myself and others cannot with such ease. I really cannot craft these sort of evil ways.”

Subaru: “Guile sounds cuter than evil ways!”

Julius sat on the driver’s box, and he had a faint smile on his face, so faint that it was barely visible.

A white cloth was wrapped around his handsome face, so his expression couldn’t be seen. But even then, as they had been talking with each other in this past month, and Subaru could understand how much he was joking based off the tone of his voice.

Subaru: “Meili, how about you? Doing your job?”

Meili: “You’re gonna ask me that? Onii-san hasn’t run into bad animal-chans even once, and neither has the dragon carriage. That’s not proof of me wooorking.”

Upon peeking into the driver’s box, he saw Meili’s arranged in a pout, just as he expected. She was also wearing a cloak around her head because of the Sand Wind, and she answered Subaru’s question with a displeased-sounding voice.

In reaction to Meili’s answer, Subaru wiped off the sand off his head while regarding the path ahead.

Subaru: “Even if you say that, it’s hard to see the results of your hard work. I don’t know if the Witchbeasts haven’t showed up because of you, or if they just aren’t around here…”

Meili: “…Hmm, so that’s what you’re gonna saaay.”

Subaru said a careless thing, being disappointed by the high anticipations he possessed, as so far they had not faced any obstacles other than the sand and the wind. Immediately Meili spoke with a low toned voice, putting her cheeks in between her hands as if thinking of something as she sunk into silence.

Subaru honestly had a bad feeling about that.

Julius: “Subaru, apologize to her. It is clear that you have just said something improper.”

Subaru: “Y-you don’t have to tell me, I know. Uhh, Meili? I kinda was a bit mean now. Well, not kinda, but completely. Please don’t be in a bad mood. I wasn’t trying to be mean.”

Meili: “…Okaay, it’s fineee. It’s not like I’m mad or anythiiing. But, I think there’s a reason for what onii-san said too.”

Subaru: “O-oh. That’s good. Thankfully, you are much more mature than you loo…”

Meili: “——So I’ll make it clear why I’m here.”

Meili interrupted Subaru’s explanation and apology, and uttered some extremely disturbing words.

The unsettling sound caused Subaru and Julius to look at each other, and hurried to form a sentence that would appease her—— It was immediately after that.

???: “————”

Patrasche and the dragon carriage’s ground dragon both stepped hard on the ground, halting their movement moving. The ground dragons’ instincts had rapidly sensed something approaching them, alerting their master, the one holding the reins. Then, Subaru and Julius opened their eyes at the same time. There, they saw it.

Subaru & Julius: “————”

In front of their eyes, the sandy surface suddenly began wriggling as if it possessed a will of its own, and something wriggling immediately came crawling out from beneath the sands. A terrifying animal, with a large amount of sand clinging onto its whole body, let out an unbelievably piercing cry es its gigantic mouth.

Neither arms nor legs were present on its body, and the way it bent its long and fat body back and forth was reminiscent of a snake. However, it had slimy-looking skin, its color similar to that of the sand, patterned with carved, equidistant lateral stripes, carrying along a horrible stench. Subaru only noticed its true identity once the head of the thing lowered.

It was no snake—— This, was an earthworm.

Its torso was so massive that Subaru could not wrap his arms around it; in fact, it seemed that its head and mouth were large enough to swallow four or five humans whole. The stink surrounding it was similar to a rotten smell, and the saliva, dripping from its oral cavity lined with fine teeth, made noise as it evaporated the sand.

Earthworm: “————”

The eyeless head turned towards them, acting as if it was sniffing a smell.

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by DdukaE (source)

At this moment, Subaru had completely forgotten about breathing. He also felt Patrasche's thoughts blanking, being transmitted across the bridle, and Beatrice grabbed strongly onto Subaru's clothes while still in his arms.

As soon as he thought of its sense of smell, Subaru remembered the smell of the Witch that he carried. If the Witchbeast reacted to that, or something else reacted to it, this group would be——

Meili: "Ahh geez, you stiiink. Hurry up and leave. Get looost."

Subaru: "————"

In the presence of Subaru and the others who could not avoid letting their fear show, Meili let out an adequate voice.

Those words caused the gigantic earthworm to turn towards Meili, but it immediately listened to that little girl's orders, and the giant body crawled back into the hole it had dug. A few seconds later, the hole that the earthworm came from had been completely covered with sand, and only silence reigned within the area.

Julius: "…That was a Sand Earthworm, most likely. It is a Witchbeast that prefers to lurk beneath sandy soil, but it was a little bigger than I thought."

Subaru: "A little? How little?"

Julius: "To my knowledge, I thought they would have been as big as a male adult's arms."

Even if the Earthworm that had appeared was of that size, it would still be big enough to pose a grotesque threat. But, that Sand Earthworm was hundreds to thousands times larger than the ones in Julius's knowledge.

It was said that the Witchbeasts native to the Augria Sand Dunes were more ferocious, but perhaps they should have considered the difference in scale as well. Anyhow,

???: "W-what was that loud voice…?"

A small window belonging to the dragon carriage's opened, and Emilia showed her face from the window that connected the driver box to the inside of the carriage.

Even if she had not witnessed that Sand Earthworm, she would have heard that Witchbeast's roar. Emilia looked worried, but Subaru was incapable of speaking right away.

Then, Meili took Subaru's place as he tensed up, and faced Emilia.

Meili: "No need to wooorry. I just wanted to let you guys know how blessed you are because you don't have to worry about that thiiing."

Subaru: "Ahh geez, we really can't thank you enough, Meili-san!"

He loosened up thanks to Meili's words, and Subaru gave her a generous compliment that came from the bottom of his heart. Emilia seemed astonished at that change; after Meili's own surprise, she immediately appeared to be satisfied.

Meili: "Reeeally? You sure? Does onii-san see me in a new light now?"

Subaru: "Yeah, I seriously respect you. I sincerely felt just how dangerous this place would be, had you not come along. The Augria Sand Dunes are scary! Scaryyyyyyyy!!"

He now understood one reason as to why the many reckless adventurers had not come back after daring to conquer this place. Indeed, it was certainly a place for reckless people.

It was the absurdity of fooling themselves by believing that the baptism of the sand dunes would be easy. Hooray for peace. Peace is the best.

Beatrice: "You're flattering her quite a lot, I suppose. Disgusting, in fact."

Subaru: "Shut up! Weren't you scared out of your wits too!? Ahhh, scary!"

Beatrice: "B-Betty was only going along with Subaru because you were nervous, I suppose. Don't get the wrong idea, in fact."

Subaru: "Don't act so tough. You pissed yourself a little just like I did, right? I can tell."

Beatrice: "Piss, I suppose!?"

Their quarrel started like a comedy episode, but nobody could blame them for it at the time.

It seemed like Witchbeasts would approach them if they caused a fuss, but the power of the being who countered that had been adequately proven. Thus, even Julius did not attempt to stop their quarrel.

However, he simply readjusted his consciousness, realizing that the ice they were walking on was thinner than he had imagined.

That was the first day of the conquering of the Sand Dunes, to which they could look back as having been worth it.

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Suddenly, light ran through the sky, and penetrated the wind.

???: “_____”

With a violent sound, the ice tower shattered in half and crumbled, having been hit directly.

The pulverized ice tower immediately returned to Mana, and every little bit of it that fell onto the surface was swallowed by the sand, disappearing from the world without any ruin, without a trace.

The light continued several times more, darting through the sky in succession.

Coincidentally, the number matched the number of times the silver-haired girl had established the ice tower.

Nobody knew what that meant, at this point of time.

However, the conquest of the labyrinth of sand was by no means a simple matter. That much was an established fact.

Arc 6 Chapter 9 – Break Through Sand Time

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 2 “Overcome Sand Time!”, Parts 6-7

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Remonwater — Complete

The first day of the Augria Sand Dunes conquest finished immediately after sunset.

Once the dead of night arrived, the longest of the three Sand Times that blew per day would arrive. If they forced their way through that Miasma-laden sand, their bodies would be ruined, and there was the possibility of losing their path.

If they were even unable to see the landmark that was the Pleiades Watchtower, then it would be wise to sit back, spending a peaceful night regaining their strength, restoring their spirit for the following day.

???: “Now that I think of think, will the Witchbeast countermeasures work while you’re sleeping too?”

???: “Of cooourse. Having your butt chewed by animals you brought is such a stupid thought that it’s not even fuunny.”

Aware of the menace the Witchbeasts of the Augria Sand Dunes presented, Subaru was somewhat, or rather, quite unsure of them. Laughing at his timidness, Meili was proud.

She appeared to be in a good mood ever since the Sand Earthworm incident, perhaps because she had proved her worth. Subaru understood that getting her in a good mood had benefits to their lives’ safety, so from here on out, he wished to be serious about dealing with that too.

Anyhow, night had fallen.

Subaru and the others had positioned themselves in the middle of the Sand Dunes, in a sandy plain with a good field of view, and had begun the preparations against the sand, with the dragon carriage at the core. Having said that, they did not need that many preparations.

Putting aside how the responsibility weighed on one person, the method really was simple.

Subaru: “Alright, Emilia-tan. Sorry for always relying on you, but please!”

Emilia: “Okay, make sure to move away a bit—— Take this!”

Emilia let out a listless yell and used her magic, just like when she had erected a tower of ice. Then, an wall of frost formed on the east side of the halted dragon carriage as cover, which would act as defense against the Sand Wind, shutting out the sand entirely.

There was no worry about the ice melting, and it would likewise protect them against petty Witchbeasts. It looked and felt cold, but after their eyes were closed, it would work well enough.

Julius: “I cannot help feeling uncomfortable because we are always being spoiled by Emilia-sama’s powers.”

Emilia: “It’s fine. I said it before, didn’t I? Subaru and Julius will be the ones doing their best while we’re on the move. Also, I’ve said this too, but I am in reaaally good condition.”

Subaru: “Seems like you’d usually start to feel chest pain, that sounds dangerous to me.”

Looking at the icy wall, Julius sighed as Emilia flexed her bicep. Gazing at Emilia’s soft, white upper arm by his side the side, Subaru thought that he should pay attention to Emilia’s condition.

In fact, the Miasma-laden air drifting about in the Sand Dunes did have a particular “heaviness” to it.

That heaviness had a vague effect on Subaru’s body, and it seemed to also have an effect on Beatrice and Julius, both taciturn. It could be possible that Anastasia and Ram being quiet inside the dragon carriage was not unrelated.

On other hand, Emilia and Meili seemed to be in good condition, Meili being the same as before.

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He did not believe they had common traits, but he should be vigilant for the appearance of any extreme effects. Although, truth was, he wished to get out of the sand dunes as fast as possible.

Julius: “Impatience is forbidden. Although I cannot say I understand why you want to rush over the path.”

Subaru: “————”

Beckoning a silent Subaru, Julius gazed up at the eastern sky blocked by ice. Subaru felt like he had been seen through, so he snorted his nose and turned away from the ice wall. Then, Patrasche came near Subaru, pressing her snout on his shoulder.

Subaru felt her doing it over and over, and he gave a bitter smile.

Subaru: “So, are you going to try and calm me down, too?”

???: “It’s not like I want to, in fact. It’s not like the initiative has been taken, either, I suppose.”

Beatrice pushed his back and turned away, although previously she had been looking up at him meaningfully.

Subaru scratched his head, wondering if his irritation was plain for all to see. Looking over, Subaru found Emilia, looking at him with kind eyes; as their lines of sight crossed, she waved towards him ever so slightly.

Suddenly embarrassed, Subaru clapped his hands.

Subaru: “Alright, a place to sleep has been secured thanks to Emilia-tan, so let’s get ready for tomorrow. The Sand Time will end at dawn, so until then let’s…”

Emilia: “Before that, Ram needs her treatment.”

Subaru: “Ah, true. That’s right. Okay, then I’ll be depending on Emilia-tan and Beako for that.”

He attempted to go through the topics quickly, and was halted by Emilia, trying to follow the daily routine. Emilia and Beatrice nodded at Subaru’s anticipations, and the treatment began with the men being put outside.

Also, as for why Subaru and Julius had been put outside once the healing begun——

Ram: "——Hmm~."

One could tell that it had started because of the voice that could be heard faintly, even through the door.

Ram's enthusiastically quivering voice sounded like she was enduring pain. A faint light arose inside the dragon carriage; the treatment was being administered with the use of Mana that combined four attributes.

Mana was being poured into the wound inflicted from having lost her horn, Ram's appearance pitiful. On one hand though, it really did feel like something erotic, somehow.

Therefore, after the treatment had been witnessed the first day, they refused to have the men with them during healing.

Subaru: "I don't get what Roswaal was thinking in wanting you do that repeatedly."

Julius: "In a way, it is definitely an honorable role. Miss Ram is charming and pretty. However, when I think about the obvious matter of who she has eyes for, I honestly cannot be pleased with it."

Subaru: "Roswaal should know that too, so I don't know why would he be doing it still… In that case, why would he still say that about Ram, if she's so far gone?"

Julius: "People's relationships, even more so when speaking of a relationship between a man and a woman, cannot be assessed from the outside. To put it another way, I am pretty sure the first time you and I met as not an enjoyable experience. Or at least, I did not think I would be going alongside you on this life-threatening journey."

Subaru: "…Well, I guess so."

Hearing the lovely voice from behind him made Subaru's face faintly turn red as he scratched his nose.

Julius had a nonchalant face, but despite that it was still a very strong stimulus to any innocent youth. But still, they could not get away from there and get sniffed out by dangerous Witchbeasts. They had no choice. It was necessary.

???: “Ya look quite conflicted, Natsuki-kun.”

Subaru: “Uwaaah!?”

While Subaru was quietly listening, the breath that blew against his ears made him jump. He lost his posture, and tumbled onto the sand, then seeing the figure of Anastasia coming around from the other side of the dragon carriage. Julius, who had been alarmed by Subaru’s panic, lost his composure at the sight of Anastasia, and he looked at the rolling figure.

Julius: “You got a little too surprised. It was as if you were thinking of something evil.”

Subaru: “Huh? It’s not like I was thinking of something evil or anything, you know? Yeah, I’ve got no idea what you’re talking about. Not at all. Not one bit. So, what do you need, Anastasia-san? I’ll listen to anything!”

Anastasia: “Ya really are bad at foolin’ people, aren’t’cha? Well, it’s fine. Natsuki-kun may be interested in what’s goin’ on inside, but I’ve got somethin’ important to talk about.”

Subaru shook off the dark disdain in Julius’s eyes, shot a thumbs-up towards Anastasia. Anastasia smiled lightly at that reaction and trekked over the sand in boots, and,

Anastasia: “Wow, it’s hard to walk. Ya ‘n Julius seem fine, eh.”

Julius: “I have trained, although I would not go as far as to say that it was for this specific occasion.”

Subaru: “When you feel unsure of your footsteps, don’t walk slow in attempts to check them, leave it up to the firmness of your shoes’ soles and take relatively hard steps. That is the Clind Style.”

It was the basis of the rough road running style he learned from the all-purpose butler, Clind, back when he was learning parkour.

Anastasia gave an admiring nod at those words, and after that, she lowered the neck of her robe, the lower part of her face now showing. She took a deep breath.

Anastasia: “I don’t get this sand, but it seems like it’s chokin’ me out. I’d like to go somewhere safe from this Sand Wind as soon as possible ‘n breathe as much as I want.”

Subaru: “Agreed. I’d like to take a bath too. My head’s already smeared with sand.”

He could now understand the reason as to why people in desert areas would wear turbans on their heads. Countermeasures for sand, heat, and cold. It was a reasonable yet inevitable way of life people living on rigorous land had to follow. Subaru too was moderately wrapped in cloth, but it was not enough to protect him from this type of conditions.

Anastasia: “A bath sounds good, yeah. It’d be nice if there’s a bath at that Sage-san’s place.”

Subaru: “…Of course, I don’t know that much. Is it like that?”

Anastasia: “Even if Echidna knows how to get there, it’s not like we’ve ever been in it.”

Anastasia pulled down the neck of her robe even further, the scarf that she always wore now in display. A major premise of this whole deal was that Eridna was the guide for their journey.

There was no point in doubting her, but he wished to work out the details.

Subaru: “I can assume that you’re going to tell me important things here on out, right?”

Anastasia: “Of course.”

Julius: “I shall listen gladly.”

Anastasia puffed out her slim chest, and Subaru and Julius got ready to listen. In response, Anastasia looked back at the dragon carriage pompously,

Anastasia: “We’ll be stayin’ the night inside the carriage startin’ today… But ya boys need to sleep at the front seat. Can’t have ya getting’ carried away with the women ‘n children in a small room, after all.”

Subaru: “That’s enough of that!”

Anastasia: “Hey, I just thought I’d loosen the tension… Ah, oh well.”

It didn’t matter at all that they would stay in the same room in the first place. His own lack of courage and the wariness of the other parties were enough for him to understand that.

Anyhow, Subaru screaming his inner thoughts was put aside, and Anastasia went into the main topic.

Anastasia: “After a full day of movin’ towards the Watchtower… How’s it lookin’?”

Subaru: “Even if you ask that… To be honest, the results weren’t anything special.”

Subaru was puzzled by her question, reflecting about the day that had passed.

After arriving at the Augria Sand Dunes around noon, letting the morning’s Sand Time pass by, and after that, Subaru and the others spent nearly half the day moving. The Sand Time that happened during the afternoon was now behind them, and it was now sunset. As for the results that were had up to this point, they would be——

Subaru: “The tower is perfect as a landmark, and we’ve got the mark for the way back that I requested of Emilia-tan. Also, Meili was more effective than expected. Those were the results, I guess?”

Julius: “The preparations we had beforehand and Subaru’s quick thinking were perfect countermeasures against Sand Time. But, the problem is Pleiades Watchtower, and why we cannot see the route up to there… perhaps.”

Subaru: “Can’t see the route?”

Subaru frowned at Julius, him having taken over speaking, but having reached a different conclusion. Julius sighed at Subaru, prefacing his speech with “Have you not realized?”.

Julius: “It is true that we have gotten this far in our journey without any noticeable flaws. I am also in agreement with the opinion that nothing has gone wrong thus far.”

Subaru: “Don’t beat around the bush. It’s a bad habit. Say it more directly.”

Julius: “Then I shall make it concise—— Subaru, have you not noticed anything peculiar about the tower?”

Subaru: “————”

Julius asked him a question quietly, and Subaru gasped.

After that, looking at the Watchtower—— a mighty majesty that could be seen on the other side of the ice wall, even in the night asserting its presence.

Even after Julius had pointed out something was wrong, Subaru did not notice any abnormality in the Watchtower. Nothing should have been different about the tower at which he had stared at the whole day, compared to how it had been upon first arriving at the Sand Dunes.

——Nothing should have been different, surely.

Subaru: "——!?"

Julius: "It seems that you have noticed. That tower clearly is not getting closer, nor is it getting any farther. We have aimed at that tower, walking towards it this whole time… but the gap has not closed even slightly."

Just like Julius pointed out, Subaru finally understood that abnormality.

The faraway-looking Pleiades Watchtower remained there, faraway, without change, its size such that it felt like it could not be overlooked. There was no sort of change in its appearance.

Subaru: "No way…"

Julius: "Subaru, I understand your frustration. However, we must be careful…"

Subaru: "So, after all the trouble we've been through today, being smeared with sand, and the distance we walked were all a waste!? Conquering this place is such a pain in the ass——!"

Julius: "…Yeah?"

Subaru kicked the sand at his feet, raising his voice, and Julius was at a loss for words. Squatting on the ground in front of a bewildered Julius, Subaru scooped out sand with his palm with his lips pursed in a pout.

Subaru: "Hey hey hey hey, you for real? I've suddenly become tired after finding that out. Saying that those efforts were a waste seriously just sucks ass. Wow, this is the worst."

Anastasia: "Yer mental fortitude's weaker than I thought."

Subaru: “What are you looking at!? Don’t you see me suffering this much!? I’m extremely depressed, and I feel extremely awful. You should’ve said something earlier, you know, once you’d noticed it!”

Julius: “I thought to not say anything until I was sure. I did not wish to discourage you.”

Subaru: “This is how you people…”

He threw away the sand he had scooped up, and stood up while clapping his hands. Glaring at Julius from below, Subaru acted indignant.

Subaru: “Can you stop speaking in insinuations? It’s not like I’ll get mad if you talk about something that came to your mind! Rather, we might find a clue from it. Do you guys have a «I’ll just keep this inside of me» sort of mentality? Has that really made the situation better at all? Not once have I thought that I should have kept quiet!”

Julius: “Ah, ahhh, sorry.”

Subaru: “Speak up immediately, even if it’s something trivial. This is something I told Ram as well, a disabled character in this conquest. Do I need to say it to everyone, man?”

With Subaru becoming dumbfounded by the incompleteness of the three Ts, “Told, Tell, Talk about”, Julius also made a reflective look. With a rare assertion of dominance over the Knight Impeccable, Subaru took that something, which he barely considered a good thing, among the many troublesome things, and turned to Anastasia.

Subaru: “So, I guess it’s safe to assume you know what’s up with this phenomenon.”

Anastasia: “I apologize that I didn’t explain anythin’… Or rather, I felt confident ‘bout my suspicions all day. It’d help if ya thought of it like that.”

Subaru: “Start from when you had those suspicions. That’s all. So, what’s going on?”

He stuck his tongue out at Anastasia, who had stated her justifications, and prompted her to continue. When he did, Anastasia preceded with “Please don’t get surprised when ya hear this”, and——

Anastasia: “This sandy plain between the Dunes and the Watchtower, the space’s prolly distorted.”

Subaru: “The space is distorted…?”

Anastasia: “In other words, contrary to what it seems, it ain’t connected to land. We continue walkin’ straight ahead, and no matter how long we walk, we’ll never get there.”

Anastasia nonchalantly clarified the shocking fact, and Subaru could not keep his jaw from dropping in shock. Anastasia, or rather Eridna, should have known it from the beginning, considering how it sounded like the matter had been relayed by Eridna.

Subaru: “So I guess that’s why Reinhard and all the other challengers couldn’t reach it.”

Anastasia: “The destination itself can be seen there. All ya need to do is close the distance… Especially if they’d been frantically attemptin’ to escape the Witchbeasts Den along this path, they’d prolly want to go further.”

Subaru: “————”

For some reason, he thought of the regret of those adventurers that had broken down halfway through their journey, their goal in plain sight, just in range.

This obstacle, which hampered those with the Watchtower as their goal, was an obstacle that even Reinhard had given up on conquering. The distortion of space and the end of the sand sea that actually could not be reached—— perhaps that was how it worked.

Subaru: “How do you defeat that?”

Anastasia: “…Ain’t’cha kinda missin’ the point by askin’ ‘bout defeatin’ and not defeatin’ it? This is a natural trap created by the Miasma. There’s no kinda unnatural power goin’ on here.”

Subaru: “A natural trap!? This!?”

On rare occasions, nature would set up traps that seemed to have an intrinsic murderous nature to them.

The frequently-seen mirages at deserts, and the snow-covered roads that bordered the cliffs of areas with heavy snowfall. Thinking about it generally, humans could get killed by things like bottomless swamps or even being pulled in by rising tides.

However, as one would expect, the existence of this Watchtower was——

Subaru: “This is a trap made by nature? That’s an exaggeration, isn’t it?”

Julius: “Well, Pleiades Watchtower was originally built at a place where this phenomenon occurs. If you think about it that way, it is not unnatural. Also, it makes sense.”

Subaru: “It makes sense? In what way?”

Julius: “You cannot forget. Yes, the Sand Dunes lead to the Watchtower, but you must not the tower is not the only location beyond the Sand Dunes. Why do you think the Watchtower is there in the first place?”

Julius chided Subaru’s rude tone, and urged him to think. An answer came to mind immediately after that question. The purpose of the Watchtower they were targeting, was to serve as a seal for the Witch’s Shrine.

Likewise, these Sand Dunes’ unsurpassable trap would be highly effective in deterring the Witch Cult, with their aim to revive the Witch of Envy. He really could not blame anyone for that.

Subaru: “…Hk! Fine. Anyway, forget the details about why and how that tower was built there. I’m concerned about something else. It’s how we’re going to break through that distorted space.”

Anastasia: “Ya know we can’t remove its source, right? This is the land we’re on.”

Subaru: “*Daijobu*[17]. I’ve understood the terrain and its peculiarities. Next, let’s look for a weakness. Since you volunteered to be a guide, naturally there’s a way out, right? A loophole.”

Anastasia: “I wouldn’t be talkin’ if there weren’t any… Puttin’ it as somethin’ like a loophole is sketchy, though.”

Anastasia smiled wryly at Subaru, who continued to pressure her, the former displaying a pompous sort of attitude. After that, she nodded at Subaru and Julius, who gazed at her, and spoke,

[17] Engrish flip. Means “(it’s) okay/alright” (大丈夫), originally “OK”.

Anastasia: “During Sand Time, there should be a moment when the space connected to the Watchtower collapses. We’ll go through there, and enter the real sand sea. That’s the condition of breakin’ through, ya see.”

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——The attack on the Sand Dunes that started on the following day had a series of consecutive, difficult situation.

The condition for the path to the Watchtower that Anastasia had disclosed must be shared by everyone on the crew. In other words, most of their traveling would be useless until Sand Time, and meanwhile, the expectation would be too much for them.

However, that anxiety was——

Anastasia: “Even when that key Sand Time comes, whether we can reach the opening’ll depend on luck. Thinkin’ ‘bout it that way, stayin’ still doesn’t sound like a bad idea.”

Meili: “Also, if we alwaaays~ stay at one place, the animals around it might remember our smell. I’ll be fine, buuut~ if by any chance you lose me or something, then they’ll chase you everywhere.”

Those were Anastasia and Meili’s opinions of how to survive without problems.

The former’s opinion was somewhat unreliable, but the latter’s opinion touched on the fact their life was on the line. It was not something he wanted to think about too much, but turning away from danger would be mere cowardice. Daring to be truly courageous, facing fears and nonetheless fighting, was something invaluable.

Subaru: “Right, Emilia-tan?”

Emilia: “——? Yeah, right.”

Subaru: “Emilia-sama. You shouldn’t take it so seriously. This is the time to make a face for a stupid occasion.”

He talked with the face inside the dragon carriage periodically, but his motivation did not diminish, even after hearing that the previous day of travel had turned out to be a waste.

They had quite a lot of flexibility with things like the food and water procured at Mirula. He wanted to believe that there was nothing to be anxious about, since the Miasma's effect was being mitigated by Emilia and Beatrice's Spiritual Arts ability.

Subaru: "Actually, I'm getting stressed out from not knowing how many days we'll have to work at this."

???: "Subaru, spit out the sand in your mouth, don't swallow it, in fact. Even if it's not a lot, it's sand with Miasma, I suppose. If you deal with it improperly, you'll have a painful experience later, in fact."

Beatrice warned Subaru, who had become completely used to the feeling of tasting sand in his mouth and therefore less cautious. In Subaru's arms as was usual whenever they would ride dragons, Beatrice took out a water container from his pocket,

Beatrice: "Look, I'll rinse your mouth, I suppose. You can't bathe, so at least clean your mouth, in fact."

Subaru: "Hey hey… Come to think of it, you're clean even without taking a bath."

Beatrice: "That's because Betty's body is made up of Mana, I suppose. So Betty is always clean, in fact. Betty being pretty anywhere at any time is a given, I suppose."

Subaru: "Yeah, yeah, cute, cute."

Beatrice pouted at Subaru's apathetic response, but he patted her head, and he played with the drills that had been pushed into his robe. They were done in braids, today.

Subaru: "Oh, we've discovered a group of Witchbeasts again… They only seem like mere animals when they keep away from us like that."

Meili: "If you move away from me and come close to them, people like onii-san will get bitten in a flash. It's strange, but aaall the animals around here stare at onii-san."

He brought Patrasche near the dragon carriage, while looking at the group of Witchbeasts that were gathering at a place off to the side of their path. Meili, while looking at Subaru with a curious expression, murmured "That's weird".

It seemed like the girl did not know about the Witch's Lingering Scent that surrounded Subaru. Subaru thought that it was of the same nature as the Miasma, but it looked as if like he would never be able to understand its true essence. Anyhow, it appeared that the scent had not faded away from Subaru, nor had its property of luring Witchbeasts disappeared.

Subaru: "Oh, could that be a nostalgic Witchbeast? Ram, take a look!"

Ram: "It's really discomforting how you talk about that, like it's a part of Ram's memories. They're nothing but painful memories to Ram, as well as to you, Barusu."

The pack of devildogs that were looking at them from afar were the same kind of disastrous Witchbeasts that had attacked the former Roswaal residence. Ram acted harsh towards Subaru, who got enthusiastic unintentionally.

Subaru: "Don't say that. If I were to depict what they are to me, you, and Rem, I'd say that they built the bridges between us. If they weren't there, maybe I wouldn't even be here right now. When you think about that, we don't have a bad relationship with the… Wait, it is bad! It's shit!"

Ram: "Stop killing your own enthusiasm by yourself. Watching it elicits pity, listening to it elicits pity, and just thinking about it elicits misery."

The stress caused by the pack of Witchbeasts a year prior had been revived. Sighing at an heated-up Subaru, Ram quickly shut the dragon carriage's window, thus concluding their conversation.

Unfortunately, it could not be helped. That incident from a year ago, inside of Ram, had been painted over into a state in which it had been resolved in cooperation with Subaru, with the absence of Rem's existence. In truth, it was unclear how would they be able to take on the Witchbeasts without Rem, but it seemed that the amnesia was something she did not feel uncomfortable with.

If the memory of Rem inside of Ram were revived, then the missing parts would be filled, and topics would mesh well too. He would think about it once the time came, although he felt like he'd only get insulted.

Subaru: "Wooow! Sand Time is dangerous! Sand Time is ridiculous! Sand Wind is dangerous!"

Emilia: "I-I made the ice as clear as I could, but if it's no good, then tell me, okay?"

Subaru: “It’s already pretty bad! The Almighty Ice Theory’s collapsing!”

The crucial Sand Time had arrived. They rushed into the Sand Wind, piercing it, looking for the distortion of space that would lead them to the tower, but they were being struck by the sand’s unimaginably overwhelming fury.

What had been a particularly bad miscalculation, was that the ice wall had been utterly defeated, despite having supported Subaru and the team’s venture with an imposing performance thus far.

Subaru: “It’s an ice wall, and yet the absurd sand is sticking onto it, so I can’t see what’s in front of me at all! Or rather, receiving such a strong wind with this wide area of ice is beyond suicidal!”

Emilia: “Eh!? What!? Subaru, did you say something!? I can’t hear you at all!”

Subaru: “The wind is too strong, and this is beyond suicidal!”

Emilia: “Eh!? You want to die!? No, you can’t! Don’t lose courage!”

Subaru: “Tell me about… Guwaaaah!! Sand violently went into my eyeeee!”

Emilia: “Eh!? Did you say something!? Say it again! Subaru? Subaru——!”

Subaru: “I’ll say it again, such a spartan act is… Guwaaaaah!!”

Emilia: “Subaru——!?”

The Sand Wind was already a gale, was now already close to being a sandstorm.

Although Subaru and the others were serious challengers, their interaction sounded more like a comedy act.

Even having a thin plate of ice with the sole purpose of protecting themselves against the thin sand blowing against them from head-on was nothing but suicidal. In fact, it would have been better to cover their entire body in cloth and make themselves small, to mitigate the wind striking them.

However, the bottleneck in that strategy was——

Subaru: “Keep going! Hang in there, Gian[18]! We can only rely on your horsepower!”

Gian: “————”

The ground dragon took the the Sand Wind head-on as it charged it down. They had already spent a few days conquering the dunes, and the bond that had been forged between them was expressed in the name it was being called.

To put it briefly, the ground dragon of the Gyras species pulling the dragon carriage was named Gian. Its tenacity held the key to break through the Sand Wind. After all, the dragon carriage the girls were on did not have any way to diminish its size against the wind.

As a result, there was no other choice for Gian but to pull on the dragon carriage with all its strength towards the wind.

Julius: “Doing nothing but forcing ground dragons does not suit my style… But we depend on you now.”

Meili: “Heeey, hang in theeere! I don’t wanna go back to that unending sandy plain again!”

Julius cheered on Gian, him holding onto the bridle, as well as Meili, who sat next to him.

Precisely because they were the ones viewing its tenacity closer than anyone else, they could believe in that underlying strength, sending words its way.

???: “————”

Emilia and the others could not even open the small window in the wind, but that they were praying with worry inside the dragon carriage was a sure bet.

As one countermeasure for the sand, Emilia had been asked to tamper with the dragon carriage with ice. Even though a sand-protective board of ice had been stuck onto the front, it could not handle the fierce onslaught of the wind.

[18] Name is a Doraemon reference to the character with that nickname (ジャイアン).

Thus, Subaru brought out his last resort, a form somewhere in-between a wing formation capable of directing the wind, and a sharp shape—— A spear that would pierce fiercely into the Sand Wind had been fashioned.

Subaru: “It’s an application of a mini four-wheel drive. Reducing its weight to make it light would be fatal, so I couldn’t do that, but I did what I could. Alright, go, Gungnir[19]—— Penetrate!”

Gian: “——MM!”

Gian stepped forward with fierce footsteps in response to Subaru’s shout. The dragon carriage that had become a spear bit and tore through the wind closing in on them with a frontal assault, escaping, moving forward, and forward.

Before long, the dragon carriage crowned with the name of the spear of a God burrowed into the scar of the bitten and torn wind, gouged out the sand’s tyranny, and then it breaks through——

Subaru: “————”

The moment they escaped the Sand Wind, what swept over Subaru was extremely sharp silence.

The wind that had made such an intense amount of noise close to their ears, the sand that struck them as if to shave their whole bodies, and the Miasma that excited activity from the Witchbeasts; all vanished as if it were all an illusion.

Subaru: “————”

The Sand Time had certainly had an abrupt ending, but it was even more resonating. The vigor of the wind intermingled with sand gradually weakened, and before long, it slowly dissipated like being pulled in by waves, and nothing but the peculiar smell of the sand was left.

However, only at this instance did that occur. In other words, that was proof that the ending of this Sand Time was a special case.

Subaru: “————”

[19] In Norse mythology, Gungnir is the spear owned by the king of Norse Gods, Odin. For more information, see here.

Feeling thirst in his mouth, Subaru gyrated. Upon doing so, he laid his eyes on Julius and the others, who, much like Subaru himself, were dumbfounded on having escaped the Sand Wind. Of course, them being there meant that Gian and the dragon carriage were likewise.

Subaru: "——Julius."

Julius: "Ahh."

Subaru called out to him, and Julius, all tensed up, gave him an acknowledging gesture with his chin. After that and before any other thoughts, they both raised their hands at each other, clenching their fists, and displayed their mutual admiration for breaking through Sand Time.

To Julius's side, Meili was seen wiping the sand off her body, then thanking Gian. This journey's Most Valuable Player was definitely Gian.

They had to show their gratitude to their hearts' content, their appreciation, and reward it as much as possible—— but,

Subaru: "Leave that for later! We broke through! We did it! We d——"

Beatrice: "What the! You're always, always being so loud right in my ears, I suppose—— Kh!!"

Amidst Subaru's display of joy, his chin got pushed up by the bottom of Beatrice's palm coming up from below.

The excellent blow caused Subaru's head to spin. Toppling over from Patrasche like that, Subaru fell defenselessly onto the sand. Subaru's head was buried in sand, a large amount of sand entering his mouth, and so, getting up immediately, he lashed out at Beatrice.

Subaru: "Why'd you do that to me out of the blue!? What's up with you, people were trying to be joyful! You scared me and made me swallow a bunch of sand!"

Beatrice: "Getting excited by yourself even while holding onto Betty is annoying, in fact! I don't understand things like downshifts, off-roads, gene shifts, burning souls and all that, I suppose! My ears were on fire this whole time, in fact!"

Beatrice turned to Subaru, and she complained to him vehemently while mounted on Patrasche.

Subaru had various things to say about it, but he certainly could not deny the feeling that he had gotten a bit excited and shouted a bunch of random terms. What the hell was a Gungnir?

Subaru: "Ahem… A-anyways, we broke through the Sand Time safely. First, let's celebrate that. Come on, *banzai*!"

Beatrice: "…*Banzai*, I suppose."

Putting aside Beatrice's sulky attitude, they certainly had broken through the sand obstacle.

Giving a few pats to Patrasche's neck, as she had done her best, he showed his gratitude for the braveness of the beloved dragon that did not show tiredness on her gallant face.

After that, Subaru rushed up to the dragon carriage, and to share his delight——

Meili: "——Onii-san."

Subaru: "Ah? What's wrong? You can be a little happier too…"

Meili: "Shut up."

Meili stopped Subaru, him trotting, her sharp words flying towards him as she turned around and looked his way.

What was included in them, was a clear warning about danger.

——Subaru was not enough of a fool to mistake what that meant.

Subaru: "————"

In response to Subaru's silence, Meili nodded while putting a finger on her mouth, and she slowly, slowly, pointed towards the front with her free hand.

Subaru, Julius, and Beatrice were lured by that movement, and gazed on ahead.

Beyond the Sand Wind they faced during Sand Time, the distorted sand sea up to the Watchtower had been cleared. Thus, the Watchtower's silhouette, looming before them, was evidently clearer and larger in comparison to how it had been up until now.

It was possible to think that now there was a definite distance until their goal. However——

Subaru: “…What’s that?”

Colorful flower beds were spread in front of Subaru and the others, covering the sandy soil that led to the Watchtower.

Arc 6 Chapter 10 – As if a Flash

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 2 “Overcome Sand Time!”, Part 8

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Disturbing the vast land of the Sand Dunes, was a flower meadow with a variety of colors.

It was nighttime, and mysteriously, the starlight was not visible in the sky of the Sand Dunes.

The reason why the sky could not be perceived, despite there being no gathering of clouds, was that the Miasma enshrouding the space above ground covered this vast sea of sand; that was the explanation given beforehand.

It was not clear to Subaru, whether the one to give that explanation had been Beatrice, or Emilia or Julius.

But, now, what was clear was, rather than the imperceivable look of the sky, the alarm bell of caution should be directed towards the ground, for the ominous bloom of the flower meadow undefeated in front of the darkness of the night.

The vivid, rather venomous flowers were excessively mismatched in the sea of sand.

Subaru: “A flower meadow among the Sand Dunes…”

While voicing it, Subaru noticed there was an unsettling feeling in the string of words he pronounced, one that he was already aware of.

Emerging at the back of his mind, was the information gathered in the bar of Mirula. The bartender there, who had lost one of his legs, had spoken of the flower meadows that appeared in the Sand Dunes.

“If flower meadows are spotted in the Sand Dunes, run away at full speed”, was what he had said.

——Because those are the turfs of the ferocious, ugly Witchbeasts, the Courtesan Bears.

Subaru: “But, even if you say run away at full speed…”

Pointing out the weakness in those words, the muttering Subaru, while gazing ahead, stepped back.

The flower meadow was the territory of a Witchbeast, that information was beneficial. There was also the mention of immediately running from the, henceforth, ferocious and atrocious Witchbeast. But, if there was a problem, it was its scale.

Subaru: “————”

Keeping their silence, Subaru and the others, who were lined up in a row, held their breaths. In front of the row, having surmounted the menace of Sand Time, having broken through the distortion of space, what had appeared was the continuous desert leading to the Watchtower—— their lines of sight were now filled with the stretching flower meadow.

It was, quite literally, dense enough for there to not be a single spot to step on.

Springing forth all of a sudden in the desert, was the paradise of the flower meadow. There were limits even when it came to shadiness.

It was something that they would have avoided even without the warning of the bartender.

That was precisely why, if flying through the sky was an option, then they would have had chosen that and avoided this without any hesitation whatsoever.

Subaru: “Avoiding it is impossible, you know.”

Murmuring in a way such that there was no difference between it and a hoarse sigh, Subaru aimed his voice towards Meili.

Under the present conditions, regarding their countermeasures against Witchbeasts, relying on Meili was an unexpected benefit. What she determined would control their path, but the complexion of her face, glaring at the flower meadow, was quite pale.

With the formation of cold sweat, blood vanished from her light-complexioned skin. Without the need of any words, it was plain to see that she had quite the negative situation in her hands.

???: “————”

Slowly, Patrasche, with her large build, drew closer with unbelievable silence. On her back was Beatrice, seeing the instruction in her eyes saying, “Jump on, in fact”, Subaru placed his foot on the saddle, and while doing so, silenced all sound and once again positioned himself on top of the dragon.

Whether it was for continuing ahead, or for going back, it would not be possible for Subaru’s legs, who would get swallowed by the sand.

Even if their judgements were made through the reins, they would have to rely upon the well-walking legs of Patrasche for fast movement.

Meili: “…For now, it seems everyone is sleepiiing.”

Subaru: “————”

Holding his breath, how much time had they waited for Meili’s judgement? After tens of seconds had passed, or to him it felt like it’d been nearly an hour, Meili spilled that out, as if whispering.

In response, Subaru, with energy draining from his shoulders, brought Patrasche closer to the dragon carriage.

Subaru: “That flower meadow is the turf of the Courtesan Bear… that would be correct, right?”

Julius: “In addition to the received prior information, for now that does not seem to be wrong. But… it is just that, the scale is larger than what even I had thought.”

Beatrice: “That difference in scale, is addition of something as cute as it being twice or thrice, I suppose.”

Letting out a single sigh, Subaru and the rest, facing each other, exchanged their thoughts.

Julius and Beatrice too, at the great reception surpassing their expectations, were in a state of having lost their voices. The ones inside the dragon carriage, Emilia and the rest, their voices of delight after

having broken through Sand Time too, had come to a halt, as they were showing their faces through the small window, wondering what had occurred.

Emilia: “Subaru, did something happen? The sound of the Sand Wind can’t be heard anymore…”

Subaru: “We did a splendid job clearing Sand Time. And, just when I thought we had cleared the first hurdle, the second hurdle was just standing here immediately, waiting for us. As you can see.”

Emilia: “As you can see, you say… Ah.”

Seeing the clearly visible flower meadow at a single glance through the small window, Emilia’s throat froze in shock. She had also heard what the bartender had said. Of course, the information she recollected must also have been the same.

Emilia repeatedly blinked her eyes, and beside her, Anastasia and Ram also showed their faces. The two also gazed at the flower meadow, and grimaced at the cruelty of the trials to reach the Watchtower.

Subaru: “Even after passing through the Sand Wind and Sand Time, the obstacle this time are the flower meadows, huh. Regarding the territory of these Courtesan Bears, does Anastasia happen to know something?”

Anastasia: “Guidin’ is my business, expectin’ anythin’ more than that’d be a problem. That bein’ said, this seriously is a bit of a problem. What should be done?”

Holding expectations from the opinion of Eridna, she, while shrugging her shoulders, did not seem to possess a plan to overcome the obstacle. Subaru let out a long breath from his nose, and looked at Meili.

Subaru: “Meili, with your characteristic, you can draw in the Witchbeasts, right? Courtesan Bears too, can’t you pull them out from the flower meadow?”

Meili: “…That’s difficuuult. If it’s ten, twenty, or even if it’s hundred, I caaan, but a number more than that and there’ll be some children to whom my instructions won’t reaaach.”

Subaru: “There’s a limit to the number, huh.”

Meili: “There’s also a limit on the qualiiity. Even I, can’t boss arouuund the White Whale or the Great Rabbit. The Courtesan Bear is at that point, it’s compatibility with me is baaad. Very different from the Shadow Lion.”

Subaru: “Shadow Lion… Ahh, that large one who showed up at the mansion, right.”

Putting a stop to their conversation about old memories, Subaru considered Meili’s opinion and glared at the flower meadow.

Countless, a vast paradise of flowers—— just as expected, even an estimate of the number of Witchbeasts could not be determined. But it was clear that it was easily more than a hundred, which was Meili’s limit.

Julius: “In the present situation, we can say that the choices we have are to either «continue» or «return».”

Facing Subaru, who had drowned in silence, the coachman Julius said that lifting two of his fingers, and tilting his neck.

Seeing Julius’s fingers, Subaru inhaled.

Subaru: “The choice to return wasn’t there from the beginning, you know. It’ll be a waste after clearing Sand Time but, with that, nothing of the problem will get solved. Going ahead is meaningless too.”

Julius: “If we dive into a different Sand Time, or if we take a different path entirely, we may be able to challenge the Watchtower. Putting a halt to consideration and plugging up its path, is that not simply drawing a hasty conclusion?”

The Sand Time that occurred thrice in the day, amongst them lay the correct answer, and that was Julius’s insistence. What Subaru and the others had escaped out from was the Sand Time of late night. Others were the Sand Time of morning and afternoon but, was it possible that the place that would be reached through would differ as different Sand Times were chosen?

No, and gesturing that, Subaru shook his head.

Subaru: “For argument’s sake, even if a different path was to be taken, I don’t think it can possibly guarantee the safety of the path all the way to the Watchtower. Here we’ve got the flower meadows,

but there's the possibility of there being a different obstacle someplace else. Probably, no enjoyable path has been arranged at all."

Julius: "…Certainly. Slightly, excessive hopeful observation, huh."

Subaru: "On top of that, possibly, there's a situation of Meili being here in the turf of the Courtesan Bears. This one is actually the best path, that's also a possibility, you know?"

Julius: "This time, excessive pessimism, huh. As always, it is your forte to denounce and uplift, is it not?"

Subaru: "I don't remember ever aiming for that. All right then, Meili. What about you?"

Harshly telling Julius off, who rounded his eyes at how unfavorable the situation was, Subaru turned towards Meili.

Silent, gazing intently at the flower meadow, Meili, at Subaru's words, said "Hm…" with her gaze cast downwards.

Meili: "The number is painful, but if you tell me to do it then I'll try doing iiit. It's not like I have to listen to everything which all of the animal-san's have to saaay."

Subaru: "You don't need to for everything, you say…?"

Meili: "For passing through the flower meadow, it would be fine if just the minimum number of Courtesan Bears are quietly gotten rid ooof. If a path is opened, for the rest I'll have them obediently sleep. If they're not attacked, then it can be somehow managed with thaaat."

As if gaining certainty in her thoughts while answering the doubt, strength returned to Meili's voice.

At the very least, she had a stance of respecting Subaru's choice of «continuing». That was something to be genuinely grateful for. Subaru nodded to Meili, and then looked at everyone's faces.

Subaru: "I think we should continue. Regardless of what's chosen, there can be no return without jumping into the risk. It's about there being some solution to the problem rather than just running away from it."

Ram: "Even though you rely on others to attain your own objectives, isn't that quite something to declare with that mouth?"

Ram fired bitter words at Subaru, who had suggested to proceed.

Receiving her “typical” words, Subaru let out an “Oh”, and raised his thumb.

Subaru: “Ultimately, it’s no mistake that we have to rely on Meili. By any chance, if it ends up being that we have to attack the Witchbeasts, then we’ll have to rely on Emilia-tan or Julius, or Beako. How wicked.”

Patrasche: “————”

Subaru: “Oh, also, Patrasche too. My bad, my bad.”

He caressed his beloved dragon’s head, who had raised her neck up as if discontent at having her name absent as one of the members he could rely on.

Against that pathetic declaration of Subaru’s, Ram, with a frankly astonished expression, shrugged her shoulders.

Ram: “Having self-awareness will be of no help. At best, in that unlikely scenario, fulfill the role of a decoy.”

Subaru: “Hearing that is also pretty nostalgic. You may not remember it though.”

Ram: “————”

At the words somewhat pertaining to the past, Ram made an anxious face.

He had been slapped with words like those by Ram, both in the forest of the Witchbeasts, or on the morning of the day they headed out to the Royal Capital for the Royal Selection. With Rem’s existence disappearing from her memories, and accompanying memories altered, now, where must have the back-and-forth of that day vanished off to.

Subaru: “Let’s go, to take it back. I don’t want to backtrack for even a second, anymore.”

Emilia: “——Hm, I guess that’s so. I also think it’s just as Subaru says.”

At Subaru’s decision, who hardened his fist, consented Emilia with a gallant expression.

She touched the pendant on her neck, and stole the feelings of the Spirit sleeping within the large spellstone into her fingers. And then, her amethyst eyes earnestly focused on the flower meadow.

Emilia: “Beyond this flower meadow, is the key to precious memories. Let’s go without stopping. For sure, I will make sure to protect everyone.”

Anastasia: “That, ain’t it a bit too uncool to be told that by a girl?”

At Emilia’s majestic declaration, Anastasia spoke as she looked towards Subaru.

He wished to retort with a “shut up”, but the truth was, if it did turn out just as how Emilia said, he thought that that would be the best, as there would be nothing to worry about left.

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The distance till the Pleiades Watchtower, gauged with his eyes, had roughly decreased several kilometers.

Before crossing through Sand Time, when they had recklessly proceeded through the Augria Sand Dunes, the supposedly visible distance to the Watchtower, seemingly of ten kilometers, had not reduced by even a single one.

Compared to that, this reduction of distance was overwhelming, and it could be said that their arrival was right before their eyes.

Subaru: “But anything and everything, comes after escaping away from this nest of the Courtesan Bears.”

Completely filling their field of vision, the flower meadow, on top of the sea of sand enshrined majesty, was strongly abhorrent.

The plants having their roots embedded into the ground, such natural ecology was nowhere here. The slightly floating stems or roots were, not growing from the ground, but from, none other than, the bodies of those repulsive brutes.

Subaru: “————”

To escape the territory of the Courtesan Bears, what Meili had instructed to Subaru and the others was simple—— to be as silent as possible.

According to her remarks, the Courtesan Bears were currently lying dormant. They would not thoughtlessly wake them up, but in exchange for that, it seemed they would not be able to get an idea of the ferocity of the Witchbeasts upon being rinsed from slumber.

Meili: “Bad animal-sans becoming active is the most brutal thiiing. The exterminated White Whale used to be the most enraged and most troublesome when appearing immediately after the fog toooo.”

That was the digression Meili spoke of, regarding the White Whale.

Thinking about it in accordance with that exposition of hers, there had been the exact moment when Subaru and the rest had encountered the White Whale at the Lifaus Plains. In other words, immediately after it had woken up, had been the worst of timings.

Memories of suffering resuscitated, and he painted his own praise for having that desire of his fulfilled. Regardless of that——

Meili: “Being angry when woken up goes for everyone, humans, animals, and bad animal-sans. That’s whyyy, stay cooompletely quiet. If you can do just that, I’ll somehow manage from my side.”

Abiding by the remarks of Meili, who possessed such strong will, thus commenced the march of the row who had clamped down their breathing.

Their battle formation was switched from the one formed for the occasion of capturing the sand dunes, with the dragon carriage proceeding further ahead. Sitting on the coachman’s platform, conveying the intents of the Courtesan Bears was Meili, and in accordance with those aims, Julius drove the dragon carriage further. Patrasche, being operated by Subaru, was running right next to the dragon carriage, without leaving its rear.

Subaru: “————”

Feeling himself bend, Subaru, holding his breath, clutched onto Beatrice’s petite body. Her body temperature could be felt, it seemed that she had stiffened her body and was feeling nervous.

Looking at the dragon carriage, upon its roof was present a figure. A figure who need not be suspected, for the familiar silhouette was that of Emilia.

Emilia: "————"

Noticing Subaru's gaze, Emilia aimed her amethyst eyes towards him and raised her hand.

The reason why Emilia was lying in ambush like that upon the roof, was so that she could move instantly in case an issue of some sort arose. Though Subaru would have liked her to quietly stay within the dragon carriage, but with the support of Julius' Spiritual Arts gone, the only ally capable of long-range attacks was Emilia. Though it was not as if Beatrice could not do it if she pushed herself, but with a single large blow, Subaru would exhaust his gas.

It was a part of Subaru's inferiority complex that, in terms of strength, he had to depend upon others for protecting him as well, those he should be protecting.

If that wasn't the case, without that, perhaps even Rem would.

The weakness of thinking in that direction, was always present within Subaru.

Subaru: "——Hk."

???: "————"

With the rise of such uncompromising emotions beyond his control, the back of Beatrice's head pushed up his jaw. At Subaru's surprise, Beatrice snorted her nose.

Focus on what is in front of you right now, was what she must have meant. Looking overhead once again, Emilia, too, had pointed her finger towards Subaru, and he understood that she was urging for similar caution.

Subaru: "————"

Unable to express either compromise or understanding, he exchanged a deep sigh. The truth was that he wanted to slap his cheek and alter his emotions, but that could put his life at risk, an action that could prove to be deadly.

And, practically at the same time as Subaru's usual detour of thoughts gave rise to his resolution, the party's forefront arrived at the flower meadow.

Meili: "Move."

At once, Gian halted pulling the dragon carriage, and Meili's faint voice slipped into the creaking sound of the wheels and was thrown towards the flower meadow.

At first, there being no response to Meili's call, Subaru gritted his molars.

Meili: "Move."

Once again, Meili called out the order.

Even still, indeed, no change was born in the flower meadow. In the vexing duration, Subaru's stomach lining started to grumble with something similar to itchiness. And——

???: "————"

With that distortion, the ground, as if truly being stripped off, and the flower meadow "arose".

Subaru: "————"

Without thinking, looking straight at the form of the Witchbeast, Subaru's throat seized up.

The Witchbeast called the Courtesan Bear, befitting of its name, possessed a figure like that of a bear. However, it definitely was different from the bears in Subaru's recollection. Far too different.

The Courtesan Bear possessed a stature perhaps around two to three meters. Its legs were short; in exchange for that, its arms were long enough to drag on the ground. Its arms were thick, visibly concealed under black fur, and it was possible to find claw-like nails growing at the ends.

From the rear to the armpits of that body, there existed vivid flowers swaying in an impressive fashion; but observing that Witchbeast from close proximity, one's eyes tended to turn towards the front rather than the rear of that body.

Though its physique was concealed by black fur, creeping about that body was not body hair. Closely packed, wrapping the body were the finely jumbled together roots of the flowers. They appeared as if blood vessels were floating on the skin, the minute roots covering the body of the Witchbeast.

Subaru: "——Hk."

On the body covered with closely packed roots, the parts which the roots did not reach were abnormally parched, and both the flesh and skin had withered. Its facial features, its cranium had reached the limit of dehydration to the point where it was visibly obvious, and its circular protuberant eyeballs were bloodshot, wielding hatred for everything in this world.

That seemed to be, as if the flowers whose roots were pasted upon its own body were slurping on its lifeforce.

The Courtesan Bears could not co-exist with the flowers. Clearly, the flowers were sapping away its life.

Courtesan Bear: "————"

The Witchbeast, which gave off an unbearable feeling of revulsion by merely looking at it, followed Meili's words with sluggish movement.

Slowly pulling out its body from the ground, as the roots got uprooted from the desert from which nothing could be absorbed, a thousand sounds of snapping limitlessly chained.

For opening up space just so that the dragon carriage could pass, the moving Courtesan Bears reached a hundred in count. And as if knowing no end, their numbers continued to increase.

Julius: "Phew."

Faintly, Julius's sigh was audible, as the dragon carriage resumed proceeding.

Julius, in that state, his body hair standing up due to the spectacle in front of his sight, must have failed to bear it. Attached to the rear of the dragon carriage, Subaru and the others as well entered the path bloomed open by the Courtesan Bears.

Subaru: "…Ugh."

At exactly that instant, when Subaru's sense of smell crossed the threshold of the Courtesan Bears' turf, a violent aroma of flowers could be felt.

It seemed to be different from the stench of the time of confronting the Sand Earthworm, with respective difference in quality, from that the sweet scent, jumbled together in the situation, did not mean that the sense of violence had changed.

It gave off the sense that their nostrils had been invaded, their intracerebral gears seared by the hallucination of the sweet scent.

Subaru: "————"

Developing serious dizziness, the repulsive stench awakened a headache.

Something so exasperating, that he would not mind the Sand Wind at all compared to this. This toxic aroma coiling up within his whole body must be driven away, was what he thought with utter seriousness.

Such wishes of Subaru were fruitless, and in the absence of any flow of wind, the party proceeded towards the interior of the interior of the flower meadow.

Subaru: "——Hk."

As if having noticed something, Beatrice pulled Subaru's sleeve. Looking at her, wondering what had come up, she was incessantly concerned regarding something behind them.

Turning around at that gesture whilst keeping that repulsive premonition in mind, the meaning of Beatrice's reaction could be understood.

With the space that had been unfolded amidst the flowers in accordance with Meili's instructions seeing through the passage of the dragon carriage and Patrasche, the scenery was steadily returning to how it originally had been, starting from the edge of the field.

Meili's orders had been realized, and the dragon carriage being able to pass, at this particular point in time, according to the instructions, had been achieved. Were they thinking of returning to their original positions, and entering a state of dormancy?

Even if they did not intend to return, they were still unable to stop midway. Of course, taking a break in the midst of this haunt of Witchbeasts, such jokes needed to be refrained from as well.

Subaru: “——?”

The moment immediately after he had thought that, the dragon carriage’s advance came to a pause.

Looking at the front while wondering what had happened, the reason behind the dragon carriage’s halt was explicit. A lone Courtesan Bear, in front of the dragon carriage, got up and stood still, and turned those hollow eyes towards the two people in the coachman’s seat.

Courtesan Bear: “————”

With that one alone making suspicious movements, the movements of the Courtesan Bears in the vicinity too, started to change. The feet of the Courtesan Bears, who had, till now, placidly and obediently made way, stopped, and as if tracing the actions of the one staring at the dragon carriage, their gazes accumulated on the dragon carriage.

——*This is bad*, was the intuitive realization Subaru had.

Looking back, they had already covered several hundreds of meters since entering the flower meadow. With the pathway behind plugged up, it was clear that they had been surrounded by the Courtesan Bears from all directions. Their numbers were in the hundreds, or possibly even in the thousands. A violent difference in numbers.

Subaru: “————”

Thinking that far, his gaze entwined with that of Emilia’s, who was on top of the roof.

Emilia was looking down onto the Courtesan Bear in front, and was puzzled over what kind of action should she perform to deal with it. If the outbreak of a fight could not be avoided unlike they had done until now, then clearing the frontward of the dragon carriage with Emilia’s magic and running through was the optimal way.

However, she did not want to mistake the timing and rush things too fast.

Meili: “Shh——”

And in front of Subaru and the rest, who were puzzled regarding their judgement, the one with utmost composure was Meili.

Putting a finger on her lips, she calmed the indecisive Subaru and the others beforehand. Following afterwards, she pointed the finger she had on her lips towards the front, and scowled at the Courtesan Bear looking at her.

Meili: “Tchtchtch.”

A finger pointing outwards, and a sound, as if flicking her tongue, leaked out of Meili’s lips.

That was a sigh, much like what humans made to soothe kittens. If the subject truly were a kitten, then it would give a pleasant impression as well, but with the fiendish Witchbeast as the subject, there was no mitigation whatsoever.

However, all of Meili’s fingers jolted at her tongue’s sound, and gradually, the Courtesan Bear’s line of sight shifted, from the two coachmen, to Meili alone, and then moved to Meili’s fingers.

Meili: “Tchtchtch… tchhh.”

At the same pace, obtaining certainty that the Courtesan Bear’s focus was on the finger, Meili slowly swung her hand, which had her fingers pointed towards the right of the dragon carriage. Lured to the movement of that arm, the Courtesan Bear, which had brought the dragon carriage to a standstill, turned its face towards that and moved, taking a single step in that direction.

Subaru: “——Ah.”

At the Courtesan Bear’s conduct, of distancing itself away from the dragon carriage, a reflexive sigh of relief leaked out of Subaru’s throat.

Emilia or Beatrice too, who had stiffened their bodies up, too, loosened their shoulders in relief. When the one who had caused a standstill moved, the other Courtesan Bears too, attempted to return to their own movements of distancing themselves.

At the same pace as before, the march through the flower meadow resumed—— was how it was supposed to be.

「ちっちっち」
指を左右に振り、舌を弾くような音がメィリィの唇からこぼれ出る。
「ちっちっち……ちぃー」
花魁熊の意識を指先に集め、
メィリィがその指を竜車の脇へ向ける。
その動きにつられて、花魁熊の視線が指の誘導する先へ、
のそりと一歩、足がそちらへ動いた。

???: “————MM!!”

At that moment, the thread of tension snapped, and nobody could be condemned for raising their voice. Suddenly, in a situation of enduring an utmost extreme stalemate, the thing known as the heart could not stand strong. That went for humans, and for ground dragons as well.

Showered upon with the negative pressure of the Courtesan Bear from up close, Gian gave out a short growl and stamped its feet on the ground, as if enraged.

Subaru: “Oh sh—— Hk.”

At Gian’s roar, which abruptly cut off the silence, the Courtesan Bears, which were in a state of lying dormant, reacted altogether simultaneously. The one attempting to distance itself away from the dragon carriage turned back, and that reaction infected the environs as well—— the Witchbeasts rose, and leapt upon the dragon carriage with their bare fangs.

Immediately before that——

Emilia: “——El Huma!!”

The Mana materialized rapidly, and the spearhead of the formed ice lance penetrated through the Witchbeast’s cranium.

The sharp tip of frost pierced through its large mouth, infringing upon its oral cavity and broke through its nape. Its brain churned, the Courtesan Bear, without raising its voice, collapsed backwards as it faced annihilation. Caught up in its potency, several Courtesan Bears, without pause, toppled sideways.

Subaru: “Run——!!”

Shouted Subaru, instantaneously after witnessing the preemptive attack by Emilia, who was on top of the dragon carriage.

Agreeing with that call, Julius operated the reins and the dragon carriage started running fiercely at once. Of course, Patrasche, too, followed that, jumping away from the side of the Witchbeasts standing stock still, and broke off in a savage sprint.

Julius: “——Hk!”

Subaru: “They’recoming they’recoming they’recoming they’recoming they’recoming they’recoming they’recoming—— AAA!!”

Delayed by a single beat, the cutthroat, fierce voice tore apart the night of the Augria Sand Dunes.

The vast flower meadow was shredded apart at once, with fangs and unsightly appearances naked, the sloth of Courtesan Bears advanced on, aiming for the dragon carriage fiercely plunging its way through.

Beatrice: “Subaru! Firmly grip it or you’ll get thrown off, in fact!”

The hallucination of being bathed in strong wind was the pressure of the thirst for blood and appetite of the innumerable Courtesan Bears.

With thick arms endowed with claws turned overhead, their merciless attack struck Subaru as well, who was riding the dragon. A direct hit and his body would get torn off easily, with strength that could assuredly force his internal organs to protrude outwards.

However, just when it was on the brink of striking, a bluish-white glimmer cut in-between, and pierced through the Witchbeasts.

Emilia: “Hi! Yah! Alright! These… So many, Humaaa!”

As always, with the Mana forming a whirlpool and a voice coming from her heart, giving the impression that the bluish-white light was performing a boisterous dance in the dark sky, that was the transformation of countless sharp spearheads pointing above the ground into blades of ice.

Immediately after a stagnation lasting a single moment, firing as if having acquired propulsive force, tearing the craniums, the arms, the torsos, the legs of the Courtesan Bears swarming upon the dragon carriage into shreds, giving rise to spouts of blood.

Subaru: “Ohhhhhh! As expected of Emilia-tan! I’ve fallen for you again!!”

Emilia: “This is not the time for saying such things, is it! Run!”

Subaru: “Yes!”

Having his life saved by Emilia’s follow-up, Subaru further accelerated Patrasche.

And with the sudden exchange, Emilia was coping with the fight with surprising composure. In retrospect, even if Emilia had shirked from fighting, it was not as if fighting intimidated her. The tendency to avoid fighting within her was an indecision that would be erased once battle had broken out.

Ram: “Barusu, run until you die. If you do not wish to die!”

Subaru: “Yeah, of course—— Eh, Ram!?”

The tough fight being put up by Emilia, the bluish-white light mowed down the frontward of the dragon carriage altogether, and the group of Courtesan Bears, who had taken a roundabout path, were frozen at the same time.

As Gian rushed and broke through the ice sculpture, now sitting on the driver’s seat gripping to the reins, was Ram, having suddenly moved from the passenger compartment. At Ram, who was skillfully handling the reins, driving the ground dragon in an agitated state, Subaru peeled open his eyes and let his gaze wander around.

Subaru: “What about Julius!?”

Ram: “Even if there are no means for a long-range attack, it seemed it would be unhelpful if he were to be the coachman. That’s why.”

At a glance, Ram looked towards the rear at Subaru’s call. Lured to that line of sight and looking backwards, Subaru thoughtlessly felt dumbfounded.

Biting the sand, beside the dragon carriage with its wheels roaring, clinging onto one of those ornaments, waving about the grasped Knight’s sword, was the form of Julius, clearing away the approaching Witchbeasts.

Julius: “Burdening Emilia-sama with responsibilities and such, cannot be done either, you see.”

Subaru: “Was that directed at me!”

Julius: “That would be——”

Putting a halt to his words there, Julius had his Knight’s sword meet with the claws of the approaching Witchbeasts. The decapitating slash weaved through the gap of those claws, and deeply gorged into the

arms of the Courtesan Bears. At the same pace, the dancing tip of the sword pierced through the throats of the Witchbeasts, who let out screams, and as if a flash, it granted death by destroying their brainstem.

That dance, with minimal destruction, was truly debonair.

Julius: “Wrong.”

Successively crushing the Witchbeasts, Julius voiced what remained of his reply to Subaru while dusting away his sword. Subaru made a bitter face at that gesture, tasting reassurance and a sense of defeat.

Simply, having put Emilia in charge of the long range, clearing away the close range was down to Julius. If that structure were to continue, the concern regarding the dragon carriage could be saved for later.

Rather, the problem was, instead of other affairs, but in this course.

Subaru: “Beako, can you go for it?”

Beatrice: “Subaru too, be careful that you don’t run out of gas, I, suppose——!”

Above Patrasche, raising his body, Subaru held the reins with one hand, and grabbed onto Beatrice with the other, and made her small body stand on top of the dragon.

And steadily clasping each other’s hands, something throbbed in the interior of Subaru’s guts. That something, as if seeming sediment, wielded heat, and slowly streamed from Subaru’s body into Beatrice’s.

Beatrice: “Minya!”

The crystals of violet materialized with the chant, and aimed for the Witchbeasts blocking the path ahead of the ground dragon’s nose. Accurate aiming, momentary advancement, the outcome visible immediately afterwards.

Raising a sound as that of shattering glass, the magical attack directly struck the Witchbeasts, and the crystals fragmented. However, the following moment, the bodies of the Witchbeasts fragmented similarly as well.

Subaru: “Alright, good going, Beako!”

Beatrice: “But, reckless firing cannot be done, in fact! Cautiously saving… Minya!”

Subaru: “What about the cautiously saving!?”

Beatrice’s battle strength depended upon the Mana left within Subaru.

In order to oppose the overwhelmingly advancing threat, even Beatrice was unable to compromise much. Tasting the seeming sense of loss, as if his soul was being curtailed with every single attack of magic, Subaru, talkative and composed, abated Beatrice’s nervousness.

Of course, such consideration was clearly visible to Beatrice.

Meili: “Ahhh, enough enough! Why did it turn out like thiiis! This, could have been taken awaaay!”

And, the one who had been keeping their silence till now, the final weapon stood up and trod the ground.

A driver, having been sat beside Ram, Meili, with her eyes tearing up, surveyed the swarm of Courtesan Bears crowding around their surroundings while making a red face. And, she pointed a finger towards the Witchbeasts who would not obey her.

Meili: “I’ll give a scolding to the bad, bad animal-sans! Come, Sand Earthworm!”

Subaru: “——No way!?”

Immediately after Meili pouted and declared like a child, the desert that had been turned up thanks to the rise of Courtesan Bears, and with the underneath of that sand being stirred up subsequently, a big frame rushed out.

Swallowed within the vigor of the gigantic beast pushing its whole body out from the underground, the countless Courtesan Bears dragged within were launched up into the sky. Falling on the sand from a high altitude, the Witchbeasts had their bones broken, and the unfortunate Courtesan Bears directly above that humongous mouth, got chewed up.

Thrusting out while tearing apart the desert, the one laying devastation upon the repulsive flower meadow was that Sand Earthworm.

Wafting the stench, raising a strange voice slashing through twilight, the Sand Earthworm determined the Courtesan Bears clinging onto the dragon carriage as its prey, and leaping with that big frame, minced and destroyed them at once.

Meili: “Goooo, Sand Earthworm! Crush everyone, everyooone!”

Subaru: “Are you serious, hey! Areyouserious areyouserious areyouserious, heyheyhey!”

The weight, capable of making the very ground rumble, writhed through the sand sea, and the wails of the Courtesan Bears being crushed by the pressure of the humongous frame echoed. Courtesan Bears too, did not possess a petite build whatsoever, but they could not possibly compete with the figures of Sand Earthworms, whose overall length could be even above ten meters.

The overwhelming masses turned into the outcome of collisions, and the Courtesan Bears got successively turned into corpses.

At the circumstance which was a decisive battle between monsters at this point, Subaru had no words appropriate for it.

Emilia and Beatrice’s magic, Julius’ swordsmanship, Meili’s unusual talent narrowly cleared the way, and the dragon carriage and Patrasche rapidly proceeded through the flower meadow.

Meili: “Ahhh! The Sand Earthworm iiis!”

Meili’s shriek was heard.

Observing it, the Sand Earthworm, possessed by a great number of Courtesan Bears who had their claws gouged into that humongous frame, was shedding large quantities of bodily fluids from its entire body, and collapsed on the ground.

The outer skin of the slimy and soaking wet Sand Earthworm was not something as sturdy as that of snakes or insects. The skin sustaining the soft body easily fell prey to the claws, and a wail of agonizing death reverberated through the sand sea.

Meili: “Next! Nextneeext! Keep coming faaast!”

Once a single giant collapsed, Meili clasped her hands with a pallid face. And, lured to that, once again the sand was uplifted, and a different Sand Earthworm made its appearance.

This time there were six at the same time, however, compared to the first one, they were twice as small, and if they were to get enclosed by the swarm of Courtesan Bears, they would get hunted down in the blink of an eye.

Subaru: “At this pace… Hk.”

They would get defeated by the violence of numbers. With a sense of terrible hopelessness, Subaru desperately looked at his environs in search of something that could help them break out of this deadlock. And, he noticed.

The Watchtower that had been so distant, was close enough to be said that it was right before their eyes.

Subaru: “Just a little bit left! If we can reach the Watchtower at this pace——”

It was not as if the Witchbeasts would withdraw with this, but it appeared likely that there may lie some fearful power there.

At that moment, it was not as if he had thought something special.

However, were they to arrive at the Watchtower, he felt there may be the strength to break free of the deadlock of this situation. The spirit of hope was like clinging onto straws. And in reality, that was no mistake.

Subaru: “At this rate——”

However, that strength was not something so convenient.

It was the iron hammer which rained incessantly without bias upon all insolent beings approaching the Pleiades Watchtower.

Subaru “——?”

Pushing open his eyes desperately, supporting Beatrice while clinging to Patrasche, Subaru scowled at the Watchtower visible in front of him. Sweat dripping along, the moment he dimly narrowed his eyes, Subaru felt a faint sense of discomfort.

At center of the tower, something was visible there, as if shining.

Subaru: “What’s…”

That, he was unable to resume onto the final word.

???: “_____”

——The luster bolted through the sky, and its aim unchangingly landed a direct hit on Subaru’s cranium.

At that moment, everything above the neck of Natsuki Subaru was blown off by the attack, and evaporated with the same unconsciousness.

???: “_____”

There present was nobody who could observe and raise their voice, at the tragic scene of a single moment.

For some reason, those who would have had observed it, and those who would have had screamed at it, had been thoroughly pulled up by the root and branch.

The ground dragon which had lost its head, giving rise to a noise, collapsed. Caught up within the force of the dragon carriage toppling sideways, the human bodies who had indeed lost their craniums were pulverized, shattered under the pressure, turned into chunks of meat.

Only the pond of blood lay upon the sand, and the parched sand gulped down the blood spilt from the bodies. Before long, gradually, slowly, the fine particles of sand dragged anything and everything rotting on the sand sea down to the belly of the Sand Sea, and concealed them.

The flowers of blood, as if the only visage of their journey, bequeathed the vivid colors. However, even those flowers of deep red, disappeared within the evermore swallowing sand.

——Here, the party greeted annihilation.

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by DdukaE (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 11 – An Audible, Tearful Voice

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 3 “The Watchtower Baptism”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——What had been visible was the luster, nothing but that.

He remembered that he had tilted his neck upwards. The moment initially afterwards, one section of the tower in front glowed white, him narrowing his eyes at that dazzle.

However, what lay in his memories was only till that point. He did not remember anything thereafter.

Neither ache, nor impact, nor terror, he did not feel a single thing.

For Natsuki Subaru, these were all indispensable retinues in the advent of Death.

Neither did he feel the ache to make him wail in tears, nor the impact that would scatter his body into a thousand fragments, nor the terror of losing everything.

Otherwise, that Death, may have had been a much more kind-hearted Death than what Subaru was normally acquainted with.

Above all, Subaru, who had died and gotten his brain evaporated, did not have any free time whatsoever to think about it, nor could he merely think back to it and absorb himself into it.

As if in the blink of an eye, the moment immediately after he thought his field of vision had been caged within darkness, the lost Life of Natsuki Subaru was resuscitated, regurgitated, and once again, into reality, was abandoned.

——Was abandoned.

※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※

???: “——Tchtchtch.”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

Feeling the weight of gloom upon his five senses as if clogging up his breath for a single moment, Subaru opened his eyes.

Discerning the clamorous sound of blood coursing through his whole body, his contracting muscles screamed out in pain. He had clenched to the reins so tightly that his nails were eating away into his palm, and felt a warm temperature insisting their existence, that of Beatrice.

Subaru: “…Ah?”

Within his faint field of vision, he looked down at the back of Beatrice’s head from close proximity.

The violent sweet aroma sliding into his nostrils, was again, different from the one when he had hugged the young girl. Beatrice’s scent was like that of freshly prepared sweet confectioneries, but what wafted in the air now was, as if adhesive toxicity, self-assertive sweetness.

He had memories of this sweetness. It was natural. It was what, just recently, he had continued to smell ad nauseam.

Rather, even if it had only been for a limited number of minutes, what was special was that it had been interrupted.

???: “Tchtchtchtch.”

Upon Subaru’s dusky consciousness reached a rhythmic sound, much like the clicking of a tongue.

In front of his eyes, was Beatrice with her body stiffened up, Patrasche who was holding her breath in, watching over what lay ahead of its nose, and the dragon carriage carrying Emilia and Rem; standing ahead of that dragon carriage was a repulsive Witchbeast.

With fine roots stretching across its entire body, a belligerent Witchbeast starved of blood—— a Courtesan Bear.

For a single moment, unable to express it as a *déjà vu*, the fresh sense of reality returned to Subaru. That feeling was not to be doubted. It was that of Return by Death.

Natsuki Subaru had just now, having experienced Death, returned to this moment in time.

Subaru: "——Hk."

——But, of all things, returning to this moment!?!?

Rather than the moment of transpiration of Death, he cursed at how unfavorable the timing he had Returned by Death to was.

Inviting the interest of the Witchbeast by the sound of clicking her tongue, the one trying to remove it from the front of the dragon carriage silently, was Meili. That scheme was only barely successful, however, and it had fallen through in the end.

The ground dragon pulling the dragon carriage—— Gian, had been unable to bear the pressure of the Witchbeast. For that, it had failed.

Subaru: "————"

While being aware of that, Subaru instantaneously hesitated in making a judgment.

The state of the vital Gian was invisible from the rear. But, Julius, who had clenched the reins, could not take notice of any peculiarities regarding the ground dragon. There simply lay nothing special there for him to turn his eyes towards.

Each one in the dragon carriage was praying for the success of Meili's contact with the Courtesan Bears.

However, unfortunately, that was——

Meili: "Tchtchtch… tchhh."

Meili's voice wielded a faint sense of stress, and her finger pointed towards the right of the dragon carriage. Lured to that movement, the Courtesan Bear slowly stepped its feet ahead in that direction.

An ambience of solace originated within the dragon carriage, and for Beatrice as well. However, Gian was unable to stand up to the slicing of the thread of tension.

Subaru: "Juli…"

Gian: "————MM!!"

Without being able to make the correct judgement, his call was obstructed by Gian's roar.

As if going through the developments from earlier yet again, Gian stomped the ground while letting out a roar, and at that wail and rumbling, the Courtesan Bears' consciousness was awoken at once.

Further exposing their bloodshot eyes, the Courtesan Bears leapt with their drool dripping down. Bluish-white radiance perforated through those craniums, the flow had been completely the same until the blast.

Emilia: "El Huma!!"

Emilia, standing on top of the dragon carriage, turned over both her hands, as if fluttering in the wind, and created a maelstrom of ice blades in the sky, with movement like that of an elegant dance. The revolving blades of ice were fired successively, with their aim set above ground, as if the encircling notes of a musical saw, the sloth of Courtesan Bears was swallowed within the lethal weapons of ice, as they raised their death wails with their limbs being slashed away.

Subaru: "R-runrunrunrunrunrun—— Hk!!"

Pulling the reins and speeding up Patrasche, the dragon carriage, too, moved when Subaru raised his voice.

He glanced sideways at the driver, Ram, who had suddenly appeared, having exchanged the position of driver with Julius, and at Julius, wielding his Knight's sword, who launched sword slashes upon the approaching Courtesan Bears, along with a barrage of kicks, that was what he was able to understand.

——Completely, the same.

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by Norvak (source)

Having gone with the flow, Subaru strongly, strongly gritted his molars.

His consciousness being unable to catch up due to the sudden Return by Death would not make for an excuse.

Putting off the impact of having passed away, Subaru's heart covered his remorse.

It could be said that ever since he had become aware of Return by Death, up until now, this had been the first time that Subaru had wasted Return by Death.

Missing out on the information received through Return by Death, the result was that he was simply heading for another death. However, this was the first time he was tracing the very same situation, despite Return by Death, without even any establishment of a trick of some sort. Unrelated to Subaru's own puzzlement, to the intentions he thought of, the rail of destiny was yet the same.

Beatrice: "——Subaru! There is no free time for you to be spacing out, in fact!"

Subaru: "——Hk!"

Lying face down in regret, tightly gripping to the reins was Subaru, and Beatrice struck her back on his chest. Looking ahead at the light impact and voice, he was able to see the truculent Witchbeasts advancing speedily.

At the same time, grasping the small palm reaching out, making Beatrice stand on top of the dragon, thus commenced the counterattack.

Beatrice: "Minya! Minya! One more time, Minya, I suppose!"

Through the palm, the aimless Mana within Subaru's body was absorbed and resolved into power for Beatrice. The materialized crystals of violet pierced into the bodies of the Witchbeasts obstructing their path, and as the crystals shattered those bodies, Patrasche proceeded while stepping firmly onto the scattered fragments.

Meili: "Held in reseeerve, Sand Earthworm!!"

Hearing Meili's shout, who had grown desperate, the sand at the corner of his vision spouted up.

The desert covered by Courtesan Bears, making its appearance from further below that, the Sand Earthworm tossed several numbers of the Witchbeasts within its huge jaws, and putting together its humongous frame enough to make one look upwards, proceeded to crush its enemies.

The second great decisive battle of monsters, but Subaru was aware of how unfavorable this was.

Ram: "——Barusu! Run till you die! If you do not want to die!"

At Subaru, who was grilling in formless restlessness, a seemingly reprimanding voice was launched.

Controlling the reins at the coachman's position, driving the agitated Gian, was Ram. She was fully in control of driving the dragon carriage, her handling of the reins no inferior than that of Rem but, at this pace, it was no good.

Subaru: "It will be no good if you keep going straight ahead at this rate! Ram, change direction!"

Ram: "——Hk! What are you trying to say? The Watchtower is right in front, the surroundings are entirely the Witchbeasts' domain!"

Subaru: "That is plausible but still, that won't be any good!"

Patrasche lowered her head, and pierced right through the torso of the Courtesan Bear in front. While having the writhing Witchbeast right in front of her nose, the jet-black ground dragon rushed ahead madly while using the body of the Witchbeast as a shield. The continuous slashes being hammered in tore apart the body of the Witchbeast, and its dancing fallen petals and fresh blood soaked the sand sea.

Ram: "Barusu, what did you notice! Say it clearly!"

Subaru: "There wouldn't be any problems if I could explain clearly! At any rate, it's a change of course!"

At Ram's words, which had a tone of irritation, all Subaru could do as well was to yell violently back. He himself realized it was a terribly absurd response, but he had no measures other than that.

After all, the current Subaru was unaware of the cause of his death.

His Return by Death was unquestionable, and yet, he could not remember the reason for his death.

Noticing it, regarding the point of Return by Death, this time it felt similar to when he had met Death for the first time in the Roswaal mansion.

First, to confirm the cause of death, and eliminating that problem.

Subaru: “The time for that, is nowhere here!!”

Having been caught up by the Witchbeasts, he had fallen prey to those slashes. Just as how the barkeeper had warned, had he become the cruel bait of having his intestines slurped on? Otherwise, inadvertently falling from Patrasche, he may have unfortunately fractured his neck. It was a thought really, truly difficult but, he may have broken down due to Beatrice utilizing his Mana excessively, that was not impossible either.

Subaru: “Whichever it may be, the memories haven’t so cleanly, so suddenly stopped until now.”

Even if his guts had been cleaved open, even if he had been encased in ice, even if his head had been crushed by a morning star, even if his whole body had been devoured greedily by rabbits, even if he had been eaten away by entangling with an absurd Authority, Subaru did Return by Death.

And regardless of what the cause of death might have been, eliminating and defeating what had occurred right before his own Death that brought him to a stalemate, it had been used as a method for that.

That fragile string of fate was nowhere visible this time. And the time to search for that fine string, had not been bestowed upon Subaru and the others.

——This was simply the worst entrapment of Return by Death.

In a scenario where he possibly passed away by the same method, it would be a completely fumbling restart. Before that happened——

Subaru: “Move from here! Whatever you do, don’t get close to the tower!”

Ram: “Again, why so…”

Subaru: “The tower will shine! Probably, that light is dangerous!”

Ram: “Huuuh——!?”

In a situation where they had been nothing but cornered, even Ram did not have the time to varnish the blades of her words with poison. While clashing with the voice possessing a frank tone of repudiation, Subaru pulled the reins and conveyed that to Patrasche.

To not go straight ahead, but divert their purpose at any rate.

Subaru: “The tower may be visible, right in front but…!”

Right in the middle of the advance of scores of Courtesan Bears amidst the sand sea, the Watchtower was clearly getting closer right before their eyes. However, what awaited them if they truly got close to it was only the scorch of before.

For that to not happen, what Subaru had to choose was——

Subaru: “Run backwards! It would be better to pass through Sand Time one more time! Let’s go back to that earlier sand dune!”

Ram: “What nonsense have you been…”

???: “Ram! Do as Subaru says!”

At the determination where it could not be helped but think he had lost his mind, Ram raised a voice of repudiation, which Emilia detained. While she purged the Witchbeasts with countless ice shards, she nodded at Subaru.

Emilia: “Because there’s no way Subaru would say something weird without giving thought to it!”

Ram: “Barusu ordinarily lives by wetting his pants with thoughtless words and nonsense.”

Emilia: “Because there’s no way Subaru would say something weird without giving thought to it in a dangerous situation!”

Subaru: “Thank you for going out of your way and correcting it!!”

Should he lament being treated as a young wolf in sheep’s clothing, or be delighted that he was a man who could be relied upon in times of a pinch?

Keeping both introspection and conceit for later, Patrasche, moving according to Subaru's intentions, thrust her feet on the sandy soil and suddenly turned round. Her tail cutting through the air mowed down the abdomen of the Witchbeast, and kicking down one of the Courtesan Bears with her leg, she ran backwards.

Ram: "——Hk! The two of you on the top and side! Make sure you don't fall off!!"

Seeing their sudden turning around, Ram, too, had Gian turn around by skillfully handling the reins. Naturally, the dragon carriage, having to bear the centrifugal force at that moment, inclined greatly and turned sideways but——

Julius: "Emilia-sama! A foothold!"

Emilia: "Eh? Ah, is that so! Yes!"

Thrusting his sword fiercely into the body of the vehicle and supporting his body, Julius brought aid to Emilia's attention to the inclining dragon carriage. Emilia rounded her eyes at those words, and magical power headed instantaneously towards directly underneath of the dragon carriage. As if assisting the wheel that had tilted due to the inclination, a slope of ice was born, and the dragon carriage, as if painting a semi-circle, rushed and evaded toppling sideways.

Furthermore, at the same pace, without killing the momentum, commenced the backward dash which followed Patrasche.

——Immediately afterward.

Subaru: "Wha… Hk!?"

The moment following the commencement of the backward sprint, echoed a metallic shrill as if slashing one's eardrums.

Subaru thoughtlessly shrugged his shoulders. From the rear, a sudden gale was born.

Subaru: "The one right now was… Eh, heyheyheyhey!"

Beatrice: "What, I suppose… huh!?"

Sensing the enigma arise behind, Subaru and Beatrice, turning back at the same time, expressed astonishment. On top of the dragon carriage racing immediately behind them, Emilia and Julius, too, widened their eyes.

Meili: “Sand Earthworm… -chan is… Hk.”

Leaning forward her body on the driver’s seat, with her throat trembling in astonishment, was Meili.

In front of her eyes, in that shape, a visage behind the dragon carriage, as if concealing it, with the large build of the Sand Earthworm being thrown up. With the frame of a span over ten meters, with thickness of body such that two men may not be able to hug it with their arms. Protruding its head above the ground, the form lording over its prey seemed as if it were the ruler of the sand sea.

The body of that Sand Earthworm, receiving the direct hit of something, had been blown off into fragments.

That slimy body skin suffered a thousand pierces, and the thick body of great length was splendidly divided into two. The body that had lost its head toppled sideways, and the head, having lost its support, slowly, slowly, headed towards them, trickling——

Subaru: “Get aside, dodge iiiiiit——!!”

The fallen head of the Sand Earthworm had excess mass, which could crush the dragon carriage under its pressure.

With the death agony of the Witchbeasts crushed under the pressure of the body that had, just now, fallen behind, Subaru and Ram subsequently transmitted instructions to the ground dragons, overbearingly averted their routes and escaped the course of the Sand Earthworm’s direct hit.

???: “————mm.”

Raising a shrill tearful voice, the Sand Earthworm’s head fell onto the sand sea with great force.

The sand whirled up, the bones of the Courtesan Bears, injured while escaping, crumbled into fragments and fell and their limbs, having been caught up in the impact, were blown off. At the same pace, the

head of the Sand Earthworm bounced, while entangling with the inevitable future of the Witchbeasts, tumbled, and finally suffered countless slashes, quickly turning into fragments of flesh.

Subaru: “Danger, danger, ous, ouuus!”

Beatrice: “Subaru, this was a mistake, in fact!”

He had felt relieved for evading the crisis of the moment but, instantaneously, Beatrice rejected that relief.

Looking at the young girl next to his chest wondering what had happened, she cleared away the fallen, fluttering petals with a troubled expression, and surveyed the rear,

Beatrice: “The dragon carriage on the other side’s gone astray, I suppose! There is only Betty and you, in fact!”

Subaru: “What did you say!?”

Pursuing her gaze in panic, Subaru confirmed the absence of the figure of the dragon carriage in the surroundings.

Only the distant radiance of bluish-white Mana and roars of Witchbeasts, furthermore, discovering a place slightly exposed to the sandy gale, he was able to understand from his view through the immense distance, the hard fight being put up by Emilia and their new servant, Meili.

However, even if they tried to meet up with the other side, the space between them was overflowing with a countless number of Courtesan Bears. And for Subaru and the rest, with diminished number of moves, there were no indications that the fierce onslaught of the Witchbeasts had been weakened.

Subaru: “Simply, half the strength! The number of enemies are double!”

Beatrice: “Compared to earlier, it has increased to four times, I suppose!”

At the face of the Courtesan Bears attacking, brandishing its claws, the cusp of the whip let out a roar.

The striking impact, fortunately, crushed the eyes of the Witchbeast and breaking through the one trembling in violent pain, Patrasche dashed once again. However, that direction was different than that of the dragon carriage of Emilia and the others.

Subaru: “Patrasche! Not this way…”

Beatrice: “It is this ground dragon’s own judgement to be left alive, in fact. Rather than Subaru or Betty, leaving it to its instincts would be better, I suppose!”

Interrupting Subaru’s outcry, Beatrice kicked and dispersed away the Witchbeasts standing in their way with magic. Patrasche marked the points where the tight besiegement had slackened and broke through them, risking her own life for protecting the two on its back.

Subaru: “Shit! This again… this shape again! What am I doing!”

Swinging the whip, he struck the faces of the Witchbeasts trying to get closer. However, with this, he would not be able to stop the power of the Witchbeasts with the expression of having lost reason.

Inflicting fatal wounds with a sword, and using magic to reduce the scope of their actions—— The power Subaru had chosen was not even remotely close to either. All craftiness, would get crushed under the pressure of overwhelming power.

Doing what he could do, augmenting whatever he had the ability to do, it had become slightly easier, was what he had thought, and yet.

The mere superficial cleverness of Natsuki Subaru, was fate only going to exhale a laughing sigh at it and trample upon and crush it?

Subaru: “I had somehow managed better at the time of that shitty bastard Regulus…!”

Beatrice: “There is no time for such deep thinking, in fact! Are there any ways to…”

Subaru: “Beako, Murak on Patrasche! Lighten her weight, then we can cross over the swarm!”

Beatrice: “——! Murak!”

Accepting Subaru's directions, Beatrice used Murak on Patrasche—— a magic that abated the effect of gravity, and the speed at which they ran further accelerated. Stepping and racing ahead, the distance doubled, and the leaping Patrasche used the Witchbeasts as a place to stand on, and tried to withdraw from the writhing flower meadow. But——

Subaru: "The li——!?"

In close proximity to his eyes appeared a white purge, and the moment he turned his voice inside out, That dashed through the sky.

The white light above ground ran through, and the sand sea was blown off by the terrific force. Facing the swift bolt of the luster, the bodies of the Witchbeasts were torn apart, spouting out blood, as they flew, flew, flew.

And that aftermath swooped down upon Patrasche as well, agitated by the wind pressure of That, which was closing on the large build of the ground dragon, and got easily flipped.

Subaru: "Beatrice! Hold tight!!"

Beatrice: "Subaru too, make sure you're hugging firmly, I suppose!!"

Patrasche: "————!"

Patrasche neighed, and Subaru hugged and clung to Beatrice's body.

Spinning and revolving in the air, the large build of Patrasche pranced overhead of the Courtesan Bears. As if pursuing that Patrasche, the corona poured down incessantly.

The sand was burst open, the Witchbeasts who got dragged into it and had to receive it were burst open, and the appearing and quickly disappearing Patrasche raised an echo of distress.

Subaru: "Whoaaaaaaa——!?"

In the midst of the attack, the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion failed, and Subaru tasted that impact altogether.

Grasping the reins and Beatrice, he had firmly interposed both his feet in Patrasche's saddle but, rubbed by the force, with his body being struck hard in parts here and there, he barely managed to grasp to his consciousness.

However, regardless of even that state, the pursuit of the claws of the Courtesan Bears under his eyes continued to shoot.

Swallowed by the terrific attack, he struggled without being thrown off. Now, if he were to fall, no way would he be saved. What barely connected his life, was precisely because he had not given up.

Subaru: "But, at this rate——"

Beatrice: "Not good, in fact… Hk!"

Subaru: "——Patrasche!?"

With the remarkably strong impact, Patrasche's roar of anguish pulled back her tall tail.

Looking at it, at the side of Patrasche, who had been flipping around lightly through the effect of Murak, had finally been exposed to the claws of the Courtesan Bears and slashed. With the scars of the claws etched into the jet-black scales, painful to even look at, from the mouth of the deep gash flowing and spilling was fresh blood.

Subaru: "——Kh, ahhh!?"

Tumbling down with the same pace due to that force, Patrasche suddenly collapsed upon the desert. Simultaneously, Subaru and the others were thrown onto the sandy soil as well, and were left behind on the feeding ground of the Courtesan Bears crowding their surroundings.

Shaking his head, his body rose. While continuing to hold Beatrice's hand. She, too, dusted off the hem of her dress and stood up, and quickly observed the surroundings with no negligence in her eyes. However, their advantage was undeniable.

Subaru: "You bastards! Don't you dare lay a single finger on Patrasche!"

Beatrice: "Minya!"

Wounded, Patrasche groaned in agony, as magic pierced through the Witchbeasts flooding towards it. Subaru pulled Beatrice's hand and rushed over to Patrasche, and kneeling down, touched the wound.

The claws had not reached her intestines but, if she pushed herself, her guts might brim out. She could not be allowed to push herself. He also needed time to heal it.

Subaru: "Beatrice! Shamak! Deceive the perceptibility of the Witchbeasts around!"

Beatrice: "Now!? Even if that's done, it'll do nothing but buy time, in fact! On top of that…"

Subaru: "That time is needed for now! Hurry!"

Bending their stance with bloodshot eyes, the Witchbeasts waited for a gap to swoop in.

Coping with them would be impossible if they assailed from all directions. The Witchbeasts eventually became impertinent, and what would be their cue depended on their patience. That could perhaps not be expected.

Beatrice: "——Hk! El Shamak!"

Beatrice joined both of her hands together, and something entirely fell out of Subaru's interior.

It rolled towards the whirlpool within the hand of the girl beside him, and becoming quiet power it swept through the sea of sand, and with Subaru and the rest as the center, tens of meters in its radius, were wrapped up in black mist.

As the foundation of Yin Magic, this was the invocation of Shamak.

Producing discord in perception, the expanse of Shamak, brought the Courtesan Bears' conduct to a standstill. Thoughts vanished beyond understanding, and even the instinct to chase after prey would be forgotten.

Of course, it produced no effect on Subaru and the others, who had executed it. However, it would not last long.

Beatrice: "If the ones beyond the range of its effect get in, it'll eventually be destroyed, I suppose. Before that, escape along with that ground dragon!"

Subaru: “I know! The effect of Murak is still active, right? If that’s so, then I’ll carry Patrasche on my shoulders, at any rate, continuously firing Shamak and joining up with the dragon carriage on the other side is what we should——”

Withdrawing from the gambling room, judging to prioritize that, he extended his hands to Patrasche.

Normally its large frame would weigh several hundred kilos, but while Beatrice’s Murak was active, that body was like a feather—— that would be an exaggeration, but it had become light. Not enough to be able to shoulder it and run.

Her yellow eyes were intently looking at Subaru. The emotions passing by in those eyes were complex, eloquence such that nobody could ever imagine being a ground dragon’s expression.

Those eyes, were telling them—— *Please leave*.

Beatrice: “——Subaru!”

Immediately after his eyes were robbed by the glint in Patrasche’s own, Beatrice raised a sharp voice.

She, rushing over, aimed for Subaru’s palm, the surging magical power took form of a shield, and right next to Subaru arrived a magical wall of violet—— and that averted the white luster that had been fired.

Subaru: “Guuuh, Ah!?”

Reverberated the sharp sound as if an exchange of blows of steel, and Subaru’s body, receiving the impact, flew backwards. Tumbling over and falling with limbs stretched out on top of the sand, the violently coughing Subaru noticed something after attempting to lift his body up.

Blood was dripping out of his right side, which had suffered the impact, and that it had his right leg thickly soaking.

Subaru: “What, hit me…?”

Grasping the side overflowing with blood, Subaru exhaled reflexively with one of knees knelt down.

At that moment, the impact which had ransacked his internal organs beckoned vomiting, and gastric juices and blood ceaselessly gushed forth out of the edge of his mouth.

Air exited his fissured abdomen, and a goofy sound like that of flatulence leaked along with the foaming blood.

Subaru: “Ah, huff…”

???: “——Baru! Subaru!”

As he exhaled hoarsely, his field of vision simultaneously inclined towards his side.

Toppling sideways, he understood he had lost the ability to move his body. He had understood, but nothing more than that could he continue with. The wound on his side heated up, and there lay the pain as if his body was melting away.

Desperately, he heard the voice calling for his self.

???: “Subaru! Subaru, don’t, I suppose! Dying is… Don’t, don’t die… Don’t leave Betty, alone… Hk! Stooop… Hk.”

His shoulder was being shook. At that audible, tearful voice, he wished to stretch his hand out, but he could not move.

His brain tissues were burning, he became unable to remember the young girl in front of his eyes.

An adorable face, but it was crying, she should not make a crying face, was what he thought.

Subaru: “————”

On the other side of that, a large, large lizard lay collapsed.

Black, it was a lizard with a beautiful appearance. In that body with no movement whatsoever, a white long and narrow something of an unknown source, unknown origin was lunging through. It was clearly dead.

Perhaps, he himself had received the same thing, was what he thought.

???: “Don’t leave Betty behind, plea… Hk!”

Sobbing, the young girl desperately hugged Subaru’s body.

With that petite frame, Subaru's body, who had lost his strength, would be too heavy.

Tears streamed down her cheeks. He wished to at least wipe away those tears.

He searched for a part that was still mobile in his body, but he was unable to find anything. That was why, he hauled something mobile from someplace else, not in his body.

Subaru: "——Uu."

???: "Subaru?"

Invisible to the eyes, the Hand only his self could see, wiped the tears on her cheeks.

Black fingers caressed her teardrops, and the girl looked at him, making an expression as if she had noticed something. The strength to smile and reassure her, even that, he did not possess.

???: "Suba——"

For a single moment, the young girl tried to say something.

Whatever that was, it was interrupted by the white purge that came flying behind her from a distance.

???: "————"

A second impact lunged through Subaru's chest.

Slowly turning his gaze towards that, it had perforated the back of the young girl, furthermore piercing through Subaru's chest, and came out from behind.

???: "Ah."

Leaving behind a dusky sigh, the form of the young girl, hugging Subaru, disappeared. As if she did not belong to this realm, the form of the young girl was rendered invisible.

Losing support, Subaru collapsed on the spot. He could not move. He did not have the reason to move.

Subaru: "Kh, oh."

His weakly moving fingers scratched the sand, that was all.

Losing its caster, the black fog that separated his surroundings from space, was dispersed by the breeze.

With the magic that deceived perception being dispelled, all what remained was only the corpse of a ground dragon and a young boy on the verge of death. The sloth of Witchbeasts slurped on their tongues, and advanced closer to that prey.

Subaru: “————”

His breath stopped, the focus of his eyes blurred. Excessive blood loss was not how it felt. Something, which felt fatal, poured upon him.

He was rendered unable to understand, anything.

In close proximity to him, the Courtesan Bears’s roar, with their claws sharpened right overhead, were audible.

Would those claws be swung down, and his cranium crushed? Or instead, now, on the edge of his field of vision, which was on the verge of vanishing, That, which faintly shined, was the one to blame.

Despite not knowing which one of the two was the reason, Natsuki Subaru’s life came to an end.

Arc 6 Chapter 12 – Baptism of the Watchtower

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 3 “The Watchtower Baptism”, Parts 2-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Mahubrobin — Complete

In an instant, the throbbing and burning pains dissipated, and Natsuki Subaru returned.

Subaru: “————”

He wanted to praise himself for not screaming at the scene before him immediately.

Upon his second Return by Death, Subaru returned to the flower meadow, beset on all sides by Witchbeast; closing his mouth with his hands, his thinking became serious.

???: “Tchtchtch.”

In a place dominated by the violence of the flowery scent, what could be heard was the sound of Meili clicking her tongue.

By gently moving her fingers and letting out this sound from her lips, she was stealing the attention of the Courtesan Bear standing in front of the dragon carriage. A gamble that robbed the breath of everyone witnessing it.

He had been brought back yet again to the scene he had experienced just a few minutes ago, making it the second time.

——Are you kidding me?

Subaru’s brain kicked into high gear while trying to get the picture of the events that happened to him.

He needed to switch his focus immediately. He had to forget that just a moment ago, countless Witchbeasts were chasing after them with an outcome of bloodshed and so, before that happened, he had to deal with the problem at hand.

The problem, the problem that was in front of him right before his eyes. What would happen next?

He could hear something that sounded much like someone calling a kitten. The actual situation was totally different from that cute imagery, but that thought was hindered by the smell of flowers.

Smelly, sweet, persistent, annoying, itchy, painful, hot, which one was the correct word to describe it?

Subaru: "——?"

The more he thought about it, the more it stressed his brain, but no concrete solutions came to mind.

His brain could not keep up with the discrepancy between the current situation and the situation that he had been experiencing up until now. Subaru desperately tried to adapt to the present, then feeling a light push against his chest.

???: "————"

Looking down, it was Beatrice's small body leaning on his chest.

As Subaru completely embraced her against his chest, she looked up slightly to show that he should be gripping the reins instead of her. Perhaps she had caught what he had dropped during his immediate shock after Returning by Death.

——He remembered the last Death, he remembered Beatrice's crying face and tears.

Subaru: "——Hk."

Yes, that was it. That really was it.

This made it the third time Subaru had reached this situation.

Twice, he had died here. He had no clue how he had died the first time, but the second time, he could picture that death to some extent. But what he had suffered at the moment of death was not clear.

Feeling like his internal organs were melted after simmering in a pot—— that feeling.

——No, that should not be the priority. Now, the priority should be,

Meili: “Tchtchtch… tchhh.”

Just as Subaru’s thoughts caught up to his second Death, Meili successfully drew the attention of the Courtesan Bear. Following the clicking of her tongue and movement of her fingers, the Witchbeast slowly diverted its gaze from the dragon carriage and was guided to its right side.

There would be no problem if the Courtesan Bear just left in this manner. However, Subaru was aware that it would not be the case.

Subaru: “————”

Right next to the Courtesan Bear who was moving away, stood a ground dragon—— Gian’s breathing was going wild.

The pressure of facing an Witchbeast from so up close, and the scent of flowers that continued its violent spread—— two kinds of pressure tormented the calmness of the ground dragon, which would make that tense thread snap.

If the ground dragon made a noise, the swarm of the agitated Witchbeasts would attack suddenly and simultaneously. If so, it would result in nothing but a repetition of the previous two Deaths.

Subaru: “————”

However, except for Subaru, no one could notice Gian’s agitation.

Even Julius, who held the reins, also had his attention diverted from the ground dragon unconsciously, concentrating on the threat of the monsters before them. Therefore, Subaru was the only one who could take measures.

But how to deal with it?

He was unable to speak. It was impossible to quickly approach and touch it.

There was a big risk in beckoning Julius and making him calm it down. Before that, if he could not make a call right now, he would not be able to make it in time. What should he do——?

Subaru: "————"

Then, in the last seconds, Subaru closed his eyes.

If nothing came to his mind in this moment, he would go full "all-or-nothing" and call upon Julius. He recalled the two previous Deaths, the onslaught of the Witchbeasts and the light of the Watchtower coming alive again inside his mind.

At the moment of the second Death, there was the fact that a crying Beatrice had clung on to him, pleading "Don't leave me alone", which drove a deep thorn into Subaru's chest—— And then he realized.

Subaru: "Beako, I love you[20]."

Beatrice: "——Hk!?"

He hugged her small body from the back and whispered those words in her ear. Beatrice was surprised at the sudden expression of love, but the hand over her mouth did not allow her to shout.

Instead, Subaru extended his "hand" towards Gian, to the front and to the side.

The "hand" which had gently caressed and wiped Beatrice's tears just before his Death.

——Invisible Providence.

Though, as his mouth was too busy confessing his love with a whisper, the name of that technique was chanted only within his heart, unfortunately.

Just then, in the center of Subaru's body—— a different sensation from when the link with Beatrice drained his Mana permeated from him, something dark being summoned, arousing a silent cry.

[20] Much like in Arc 5 Chapter 1, this is yet another "aishiteru" (愛してる), the granddaddy of "I love yous". And much like I wrote in that one footnote, important to note that it is not strictly used in the romantic sense, before you start getting any weird ideas.

Asserting its gratitude at being summoned aloud, that which accomplished the lazy Natsuki Subaru's goals on his behalf, arrived the Unseen Hand that was not of this world.

Subaru: "————"

With Subaru's chest as its pivot point, the black hand that had been created slowly manifested itself in the world. Of course, its existence could not be seen by anyone except for Subaru. As he was embracing Beatrice, the Unseen Hand just went through her, and it seemed like it did not make any unintended contact.

While admiring that fact, he could feel that something in him was being drained away each second. Whether it was his soul or sanity, Subaru did not know. However, he could not afford to take too much time to avoid reaching out to Julius.

The black magic stretched to Gian's neck, who seemed like it was about to roar at any moment. The palm slowly stroked its thick neck coated by bulky scales.

The large ground dragon trembled from being touched by someone, but somehow, its instincts probably felt that there was no hostility in the touch of the palm. And so, the ground dragon's rough breath calmed down, its body relaxing.

Julius: "——Huh?"

Then, also noticing Gian's reaction, Julius pulled the reins and soothed the ground dragon in earnest. As expected from Julius, he skillfully handled the ground dragon, noticing its agitation, with what could have otherwise been devastating.

Confirming that, Subaru immediately cut off the connection with the Unseen Hand. With the black palm deprived of freedom, it dissipated in an instant, fading away into the parched wind of the sand sea, as if nothing had happened.

Subaru: "Ha, fuuu…"

After dodging that bullet, Subaru took a long breath of relief.

At the same time, he felt like a dark black cloud was stuck in his chest, and he wanted to retch. Of course, things would not be so easy. That sense of loss was the price to pay for using the Invisible Providence, and it remained engraved in the soul.

Thus, Subaru thought about the feeling of loss being gouged in his chest.

Invisible Providence—— the cost of employing the Unseen Hand, the feeling of loss and breathlessness it caused, were certainly easier to deal with than before.

The first time Subaru used the Invisible Providence had been when fighting Garfiel back at Sanctuary. At that time, Subaru had unleashed his power in a feverish manner, and was assaulted by a sense of loss and intoxication that caused a feeling like half his body was gone, causing his consciousness to wobble.

Perhaps it was disgust for the opponent who had utilized that very same power before Subaru, and it was no excuse that the incident happened after Garfiel had beaten him to a pulp in the first place.

It was a strange ability—— rather, Authority, that endlessly intrigued Subaru with the dangers of using it, as well as the circumstances that made it available to him. Therefore, he had never thought to actively use this force until now.

Subaru's Invisible Providence none of the power or flexibility of the Unseen Hand originally wielded by that madman. At best, wiping away tears or stroking the head was all he could muster.

To pay with the whittling down of his soul was a cost too prohibitive. With that in mind, he thought the only means was to meet it halfway.

Subaru: "It's not like I've gotten used to it."

Shaken with a feeling of loss and disgust, Subaru felt more anxiety than relief.

What Subaru believed, was that it was always good to hold more cards in one's hands, but that did not mean that possessing multiple pairless jokers in Old Maid would do him any good[21].

[21] Old Maid is a card game from the Victorian era, in which players must discard any pairs they have in their hand. The last player left with a card without a pair is the loser. For more information, see here.

Of course, it would serve as a powerful hand in games other than Old Maid——

Subaru: “Uh, uh, uh.”

Beatrice: “…What have you been doing for a while now, I suppose?”

Subaru: “Oh? What…”

As Subaru let out a small shriek amidst his worries, a grumpy voice suddenly appeared. Upon opening his eyes to see what was happening, he found his eyes meeting with Beatrice’s own, staring at him.

And that Beatrice looked quite unusual.

Subaru: “Beako, what happened to your head and dress?”

Beatrice: “——It’s the result of Subaru being glued to Betty’s hair and clothes all the time, in fact. Why do I have to suffer such a humiliation, I suppose!”

Subaru: “Huh, me?”

In front of Subaru, who was tilting his head cluelessly, a furious Beatrice was attempting to hide the anger in her voice.

Her splendid drills were jumbled, and both the delicate dress and the white cloak to protect the dress from Sand Wind, were arranged eccentrically and running at the forefront of fashion. It was a state-of-the-art pattern that no one had ever thought of.

Beatrice: “——Your lack of self-awareness is irritating, in fact! You were very worried so I overlooked it, but then it went on and on and on and on and on… And on top of that, do you… even remember saying those words of love, I suppose?”

Subaru: “No, I remember that. I really mean it when I say *aishiteru*[22], Beako.”

Beatrice: “Hmph!”

[22] Engrish flip. Means “I love you” (愛してる), originally “LOVE”.

To those candid words, a red-faced Beatrice completely covered her head with her cloak. He really wished to admire that unfamiliar cute appearance, but right now he could not play with Beatrice.

As a result of Subaru's unspeakable efforts, Gian would not make a fuss and would attempt to resume the march of the dragon carriage by relying on Meili's ability. However, as Subaru went through the gulf opened between the Courtesan Bears, he brought Patrasche close to the coachman's spot.

Subaru: "Julius, Meili. Let's make a temporary retreat—— Things are bad."

It was because of the two Deaths, that he proposed a rework in their strategy.

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Meili: "I'm disappointed in you, onii-san. It was only a bit tense, I didn't want to run away so soooon."

Ram: "After all, Barusu is still Barusu. I thought that after becoming Emilia-sama's Knight, he would be a little better. But I guess a person's character doesn't change that easily. Pulled out too soon[23]."

Subaru: "There's no harm in just re-enforcing a safety measure!"

After managing to turn back from the flower garden and returning to the meeting place which they had set up after breaking through Sand Time, Subaru was being stabbed with strict criticism for making the decision to withdraw.

Meili, who had successfully tamed the Courtesan Bears and opened the way towards the tower, and then Ram, who had been stuck by the window in the dragon carriage, prepared for any emergency situation.

Subaru, who had stopped the march of the dragon carriage and requested a face-to-face meeting on the sand, was shrinking as he was cornered about stopping their progress based on just his own opinion.

[23] So, a fun fact: the literal translation for the Japanese here is "簡単", which literally means "premature ejaculation". But it doesn't translate to English all that well, so the subtly-sexual "pulled out too soon" translation is frankly hilarious.

Emilia: “But, I don’t think that Subaru’s judgment was wrong. Even if we got reaaally far through the flower gardens, I think that it’s still the same situation as a little while ago. If we did that, you wouldn’t have been able to get out like we did now.”

Meili: “Onee-san doubts my ability? You believe onii-san more than me?”

Emilia: “We’ve come this far. I believe in both of you, but my opinion is that I especially want to believe what Subaru says. Sorry.”

Subaru: “EMM…”

It was *Emilia-tan Maji Megami*[24], that who fought against Meili’s childish rebuttals while putting her heart into it. As if in prayer, Subaru brought his hands together, and beside him, Beatrice fixed her disorderly clothes and hair.

Beatrice: “So what do you intend to do after all, in fact. If the Witchbeast girl’s Divine Protection is not to be trusted, it’s too reckless to pass through this flower garden, I suppose. If Bubby were here, it wouldn’t have been difficult to annihilate a whole herd of Witchbeasts, but that’s not the case, in fact.”

Emilia: “If only Puck were here, oh well. I guess I’ll try my best?”

Subaru: “I really want that to be the last resort. And even if you completely annihilate the Courtesan Bears here, I feel that other Witchbeasts will fill the gaps and it’ll become an infinite loop. What do you say, Meili?”

With the flow being directed towards her, wearing a pout on her face, Meili averted her face. The girl crouched down, putting her chin over her knees, displaying the attitude of a child,

Meili: “Whaaaat is it?”

Subaru: “It’s weird that the flower gardens would be a territory for only Courtesan Bears. To put it bluntly, if the Courtesan Bears weren’t around, it’d be a home for other Witchbeasts, no?”

Meili: “…It may be right, or it may be not right.”

[24] “エミリアたん・マジ・小悪魔”, translated as “Emilia-tan is seriously a goddess”.

Subaru: “Which is it?”

Meili: “Yeah, what onii-san said is right. But what are you gonna do?”

While affirming Subaru’s point of view, Meili questioned him back. Receiving her dissatisfied look, Subaru frowned, and Julius shrugged his shoulders.

Julius: “I understand Miss Meili’s point. Subaru’s worries are justified, but there is nothing to be gained just by fretting over unexpected situations. If we could predict what would happen and deal with it accordingly, we would not dub it «unexpected».”

Subaru: “Even so, just leaving it all in the hands of a Divine Protection and rushing in without thinking, is a different thing. Or maybe I should say, that proposal would be very unlike you. That’s more like Garfiel’s role.”

Julius: “Naturally, I would never suggest such recklessness. We should decide what to do after a constructive discussion. Whether we proceed or return, that is.”

Just like before entering the flower meadow, Julius said this, raising his two fingers.

As Subaru snorted at the gesture, everyone began thinking about the situation.

Ram: “What if Barusu acted as a decoy to lure out the Witchbeasts? Then while they chase after him, we find a gap for us to break through.”

Subaru: “United we stay!”

Ram: “Ram and the others will be safe, and any nefarious insects can be kept away from Rem. It is a great idea.”

Subaru: “I’ll be devoured!”

Emilia: “Still, I’ll work reaaally hard to fight for everyone and such…”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan comes to such unexpectedly meat-headed conclusions at these times.”

Emilia: “*Meat-hee*… Huh, what are you saying suddenly? I’m humiliated.”

Subaru: “It’s unusual to me, this isn’t an unconditional compliment to Emilia-tan, okay?”

Julius: “Leave it to Miss Meili’s Divine Protection, and we will advance through the flower garden until we can no more. Once we have reached the limit, we shall launch a preemptive attack and rush to the Watchtower. It is a powerful gamble.”

Subaru: “I can’t explain it, but it’ll fail. I can’t explain it, but I’m sure.”

Julius: “Hmm. You say this as if you possess an absolutely certain basis.”

Subaru: “Ah, I don’t know. It’s hard to explain.”

It was tough to dismiss the progression strategy without touching on the forbidden subject of Return by Death. And, during the strategy meeting that seemed somewhat lacking in progress, Subaru noticed something, and tried his luck.

Because he had to give first priority to Gian’s shock, then afterward the retreat from the flower garden, he had forgotten to sort out the cause of those two Deaths which had actually triggered his return in the first place.

The first time around it had occurred too suddenly, and the second time around, it was a mess, so it was not very clear to him—— but the cause of both of Subaru’s deaths was related to the fact that the tower in front had been glowing.

Subaru: “That tower glows, is there anyone else seen that?”

Everyone: “The Watchtower glows…?”

At Subaru’s question, everyone tilted their heads with surprised faces.

Subaru groaned at the poor response and that no one saw it. It was somewhat natural. In honesty, Subaru had witnessed that light at more-or-less the same time of his Death. If that light really possessed an intent to kill, then all those who laid their eyes upon it would not live to tell the tale.

An attack that would materialize certain death, that was what he should regard it as.

Anastasia: “Natsuki-kun, ya saw the tower glowin’?”

Subaru: “Huh? Ahh, I don’t think I’m mistaken about it, I think it might’ve shined.”

Anastasia: “When was that?”

Subaru: “…When I was in the flower garden, I believe?”

He replied to Anastasia’s inquiry in the form of another question.

However, because the situation in the flower meadow meant that he could not speak out, it did not seem suspicious that he had kept quiet about the light at the tower. Since Subaru had seen the tower’s light both times Return by Death was activated, it was possible that the taboo would be considered as violated.

For a second, he felt sorry that he was able to report the truth only in in irregular bits——

Subaru: “If the tower lights up, doesn’t that mean the Sage-in-the-Tower-san was watching us?”

Anastasia: “Not necessarily, it’s nighttime too, it wouldn’t be strange to use a light.”

Emilia: “I see. If the Sage has noticed us, it may be a good idea to let them know that we don’t mean any harm.”

Except, since Subaru’s argument had been blurry and ambiguous, Emilia’s thoughts went in a completely different direction. Of course, it was a journey to seek friendly contact.

If the cause of the light was indeed the Sage, it was only natural that such an opinion would arise.

But to Subaru, who was aware that the light was anything but friendly, this would be the same as running towards a cliff.

Subaru: “Wait, let’s try to sort out our information for now. And then let’s decide whether or not to get in touch with the Sage.”

Emilia: “Sort out our information?”

Subaru: "Yeah, organize. Because, you know, it's all there. That light's not necessarily a sign of life from the Sage. It's more, uh… There's possibility of it being a dangerous thing like a *tanshoutou*[25], isn't there?"

Emilia: "*Tanchoto*[26]…"

Anastasia: "In other words, Natsuki-kun's suspectin' that the light he saw's like a defense mechanism set up by the Sage?"

Subaru: "Exactly!"

While Emilia had a question mark hovering over her head because of the unknown Western characters used, Anastasia, or rather, Eridna, understood the true meaning of Subaru's words. And hearing that and pondering over it, was Julius. The Knight murmured, "Is that so?" under his breath, and,

Julius: "I do not know whether the Sage has been alive for hundreds of years, or if it is merely exaggeration. Is it possible that the Sage has left behind his legacy, still working as a device to protect the world?"

Subaru: "Oh, oh… I didn't think so far ahead, but it's possible."

Julius: "If that is the case, it would assume for convenience that everyone approaching is one who schemes to resurrect the Witch of Envy, even the Kingdom's envoys. It has been a long-standing mystery as to why the Sage, who was supposed to be friendly towards the Kingdom, would display such violent conduct as told in reports."

Seemingly relieved, Julius spoke, spurring Subaru's admiration with a "So there's also this way of thinking?".

Indeed, it was plenty common to find defense systems having been prepared and left behind by great men in the past that, even after the death of their master, would still remain in place, driving away intruders. In a world where magical devices were rife, it was not so strange for such a system to exist.

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[25] Engrish flip. Means "searchlight" (探照灯), originally "サーチライト" (searchlight).

[26] Subaru's "searchlight" is written in Katakana, while Emilia's in Hiragana (さーちらいと). To replicate this, we'll have her mispronounce it oh-so-slightly.

Subaru: “If that’s the case, I want you to give me a break because it means this trip will be a waste.”

Ram: “With the Sage dead, it is merely a matter of collecting any documents left by the Sage. It’s still too early to leave the world in despair, Barusu.”

Subaru: “I’m not gonna let nee-sama’s bullying manner get to my head.”

If Julius’s speculations were correct, the whole foundation of the journey would be undermined. But even against such a possibility, Ram’s determination would not waver nor change. As one would expect.

Anastasia: “In any case, keepin’ watch for hundreds of years without rest… it may be possible, altho’ it ain’t realistic. Besides, I don’t think there’s such a need to be disappointed ‘bout whether Sage Shaula’s dead or alive.”

Emilia: “Really? Why?”

Anastasia: “It’s not particularly surprisin’ that they’d be alive even now, if they’re from a long-lived race. My Echidna’s birth itself was hundreds of years ago.”

Pulling out the white scarf from inside her robe, Anastasia smiled. In response to that, Emilia stare absent-mindedly, and immediately touched her pendant, thinking of Puck.

Emilia: “Oh, my Puck also lives a long time. I’m not losing to that Echidna.”

Subaru: “Why are you competing with each other, Emilia-tan? Well, my Beako is quite the loli-granny too. Right?”

Beatrice: “Do you think Betty will just laugh and answer that, I suppose? Disgusting, in fact.”

As Beatrice sneered with anger, Subaru shrugged. With the conversation having diverted from the main subject, Ram clapped her hands.

Ram: “The Sage being dead or alive is irrelevant to the discussion. Leaving that aside, the problem is the true identity of the light that Barusu saw. Whether that is dangerous, or just Barusu’s delusion, we have to reach a conclusion.”

Subaru: “It’s about time our relationship develops to the point you don’t doubt whether what I report is true or false, you know?”

Ram: “It is not about deciding whether it is a lie or not, Ram will concede on this matter.”

If they did not reach a consensus, it was likely that there would not be any progress. In any case, the discussion ended up returning to the subject of the true identity of the light.

Subaru: “I… think it’s dangerous. At the very least, it’s not friendly.”

Julius: “And the basis is, just intuition?”

Subaru: “…Well, that’s right.”

Julius: “Right—— that’s troublesome.”

The light of the Watchtower—— Subaru was convinced that it was the cause of both of his Deaths, but to convey that fact was a difficult task. So, he thought it would be impossible to use “intuition” as his reason, but surprisingly, Ram took that reply seriously.

And not only Ram, but Emilia and Julius too.

Subaru: “Eh? Just based on my intuition? You don’t have any more doubts about it?”

Emilia: “If this were only a hunch, I’d think so, but it’s Subaru’s intuition, right? In that case, it makes more sense to think about it than to doubt it suddenly.”

Julius: “Do not be so self-deprecating. You have been through this kind of hopeless situation already, have you not? There is a certain kind of intuition that only works for such a person. To put it in other words, it is somewhat alike a rule of thumb. It is by no means something to make light of.”

Ram: “Like when field mice change their territory before heavy rain. Barusu’s intuition cannot be fooled.”

Subaru: “It’s just stupid enough… Is that what you’re saying?”

Like a reflex reaction to the poisonous remarks thrown his way, Subaru’s shoulders relaxed a tad.

Not being able to reveal the source of his information, even to those close to him, was an absurd reality. Subaru had come across the same situation many times, but each time he was saved by the concern and trust of the others around, in the same way, over and over again.

Rem in the Royal Capital, Otto and Ram in Sanctuary, Emilia and Beatrice in the city of Pristella. They all believed in Subaru, in what he was.

Subaru: “There’s no way to catch their attention in a friendly way. If you even make a loud voice, Bear-san will come to welcome us before the Sage does.”

Julius: “That is something I wish to avoid. Then, the realistic means should be sending Emilia-sama’s magic… Or so it seems.”

While looking towards the Watchtower, Julius stretched his right hand and closed one of his eyes.

It was a gesture akin to a painter attempting to get a sense of distance. Then staying like that, silently thinking for a moment,

Julius: “Roughly, from here to the Watchtower is around ten kilometers—— it is not a realistic range for Emilia-sama’s magic, if produced from the front of the flower garden.”

Subaru: “By the way, how far can you cast your magic Emilia-tan?”

Emilia: “How far? Well, I haven’t tried to measure it before, so I don’t know. But I don’t think it can reach the tower from here. It’ll disappear before it hits.”

The silhouette of the Watchtower at their current location was clearly closer than the silhouette visible before the Sand Time. In fact, on their trip through the field of flowers, they had come very close.

Even so, the plan to aim at the tower from the edge of the flower garden was not practical.

Subaru: “If passage were granted by simply informing them of one’s existence, Reinhard would’ve been able to get through. Being that guy, it’s like… couldn’t he make a magical attack that could cover a distance of about ten kilometers?”

Julius: “There is no way of knowing that, except asking him, but it is likely that Reinhard did not get through Sand Time when challenging this trial. We have only reached this far because Anastasia-sama… No, because Echidna knew the way.”

Subaru: “Got a point there… Ahh, shit. Don’t you know anything more?”

As the proposal was rejected, Subaru pointed to Eridna with a melancholic voice. Then, playing her part as Anastasia, Eridna appeared skillfully handling the muffler concealing her state,

Echidna: “I do not like you putting it like that. Just being able to claim the existence of a path to be found after Sand Time is an achievement that had yet to be accomplished. Should you not give me more credit?”

Subaru: “We’re the first to get here, is that it? Claiming to have the way there in memory, but you’re actually a newspaper man on delivery duty with only a faint recollection. You’re not doing your job.”

Echidna: “Hmm, got a point there.”

Despite Subaru’s theory being rude, Eridna did not attempt to refute it. The scarf kept silent, and that pondering attitude also passed onto Anastasia. Then, suddenly raising her face, Anastasia,

Anastasia: “That’s right. But now, looks like it’d be better to sum up the things we know at the moment.”

Subaru: “The things we know—— So.”

Anastasia: “Natsuki-kun’s light of the Tower, as well as its supposed danger, the Witchbeasts’ flower garden present in front of the Tower, the three Sand Times, ‘n… Is there somethin’ else?”

The information that Anastasia listed had all been established so far.

It was important to build a path and pave the way to a conclusion. Subaru folded his arms and recalled the journey thus far and the dangers he had witnessed, for a while.

Subaru: “Now, this is the place that we came to after choosing to cross the Sand Time of the night. Then there’s the fact that it’s too much of a burden on the ground dragons to pass through that flower field. Also, I’m pretty sure Meili brought a Witchbeast alongside us without telling anyone.”

Meili: “Ehh!?”

Subaru spoke while counting on his fingers, and Meili’s shoulders hitched in a panic. Everyone’s eyes turned to the little girl, having seen her blatant reaction.

In response, Meili hurriedly shook her head and,

Meili: “Wha, wait, wait. Yes, onii-san is right, but… how does onii-san know that?”

Subaru: “Guesswork. It was just a trick question.”

Julius: “Still, it seems that Subaru’s imagination was right—— What will you do?”

Julius, in a quiet voice, questioned what should be done regarding Meili’s betrayal. Hearing that attitude, Meili’s face turned pale, but Subaru did not wish to make matters worse.

Stopping Julius with his hand and fixing his eyes on Meili,

Subaru: “Don’t worry. I’m not talking about scolding her. I understand it’s just your insurance. Still, it was just a suspicious factor.”

Meili: “D-do you want me to let it go? Then, you won’t be angry?”

Subaru: “There’s no need to release it. If you think you need one, please keep it. If we’re being surrounded or chased by a group of Courtesan Bears, it’d be a great help.”

Meili: “————”

Thinking he must be joking, Meili widened her eyes and just nodded. Just to be sure, Subaru stared back at Julius, who had yet to loosen his vigilant eyes,

Subaru: “That’s what children do. Let’s give her a pass.”

Julius: “If that is the appropriate handling of a child growing up, then I shall do my utmost to do likewise. However, the girl’s power is too strong to simply trust in her openly. Even more so in the land of Augria, which can be said to be the garden of Witchbeasts.”

Subaru: “Even so. We’re all sharing the same dragon carriage, so please get along.”

With that statement of Subaru's, Julius hesitated a bit and then ceased reaching for his sword. Then, instead of the silent Julius, Emilia raised her hand.

Emilia: "So, Subaru. Let's continue the talk from earlier."

Subaru: "Yes, yes. Let's move on."

Emilia: "When it comes to passing through the flower garden… What do you plan to do? Do you want to try the same thing with another Sand Time and see if it goes to a different place?"

Subaru: "That's one way, but… There's something I'd like to try briefly."

Emilia: "Something you'd like to try?"

Having no clue as to what Subaru was thinking, Emilia tilted her head in confusion. Copying that from Emilia, Subaru turned his eyes toward the edge of the flower meadow—— the sea of flowers that filled the area up to the Watchtower.

Of course, it was not possible to see its end——

Subaru: "If the flower garden comes to an end somewhere, we won't have to worry about being targeted from all sides at least. It's worth a try checking whether there is an edge like that or not, right?"

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——And so, their plan had all the participants verifying the edge of the flower garden.

Julius: "If moving in separate groups, getting lost would be devastating. Besides, it would not be sensible to advance in the immediate vicinity of monsters without Miss Meili's assistance."

Julius's point gained unanimous approval. Subaru also agreed on this, and decided to give priority to safety rather than convenience alone.

Subaru: "Well, I'd like to start departing soon, but."

Everyone prepared to depart, getting on their respective dragon carriage or ground dragon.

With the rule to always keep the Watchtower's silhouette on their right side, and with the direction they were heading towards was to the left, the party would make sure they were heading north.

However, whether the rules of east, west, north, and south still worked in the Sand Dunes, was a different affair altogether.

Subaru: "Thinking calmly about it, this whole place's also a strange case of space-time distortion. If by going through Sand Time you arrive here, it's somewhat similar to Door Crossing…"

Beatrice: "I don't know what Subaru is trying to say, in fact. It's true that distorting space and making physical distance vague is one application of Door Crossing, I suppose. Betty set up Subaru into it once too, in fact."

Subaru: "You did, to me? When?"

Beatrice: "…I'll never forget it, it was on our first encounter, I suppose."

Subaru: "First encounter… Oh! In Roswaal's mansion, when I *shiageta*[27] that infinite loop corridor in one try! I'm sorry about that. Even though it was so hard for you to prepare it, I'm sorry for tramping all over your hard work… Sorry?"

Beatrice: "You seriously apologizing for it is seriously frustrating, in fact! Forget it, I suppose!"

Subaru: "You reminded me…"

Beatrice: "Hmph! That's it, in fact!"

Riding with him, Beatrice was getting somewhat angry, so Subaru had no choice but to take on the difficult task of handling the peculiar girl. For the time being, he held her in his arms and soothed her, commanding Patrasche to walk towards the dragon carriage. And then,

Subaru: "Are you ready there?"

Julius: "Without a problem. Now all we need is for Emilia-sama to perform her task."

[27] Engrish flip. Means "completed" (仕上げた), originally "クリアした" (cleared).

Emilia: “That’s right.”

Nodding to Julius, who had finished his preparations on the carriage’s coach, Subaru looked up at the roof. Much like in their march into the flower garden, Emilia’s position was still fixed on the roof of the dragon carriage.

Subaru raised his hand to Emilia, who seemed enthusiastic while standing high, and asked her to create a landmark as she had before.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, please here. For the time being, this is our base camp. Be as quiet as possible… like, so you don’t disturb the Witchbeasts.”

Emilia: “Okay, understood. If I wake up a Witchbeast with this, all the trouble we went to being all quiet back then would be meaningless, right. So, quietly, quietly, quieeetly.”

Subaru slowly moved his hand gesturing to go slowly, and Emilia mimicked it while, before their eyes, a tower of ice emerged from the sand.

It seemed like they were right in their judgement that it would proceed quietly; in fact, the ice tower was built slowly and gently, so the usual tense sound in the air went unheard. A few parts had come out looking a bit weak, but it had a fine finish, and seemed to be able to fulfill its role safely.

Emilia: “Is it okay?”

Subaru: “*Yoshi*[28], no problems. As expected, Emilia-tan!”

Giving the anxious Emilia a big “O” and “K”, Subaru peeked in the direction of the flower beds.

There were concerns regarding the Witchbeasts, namely if they would be able to sense Mana activity, but fortunately, there was no sign of anything other than the sweet scent of nectar flowing from the flower gardens.

Actually, it seemed quite dull.

[28] Engrish flip. Means “okay/alright” (よし), originally “OK”.

Subaru: “Even now I wonder, why are they pretending to be a flower garden…? If they want to camouflage themselves, don’t you think a desert is a strange place to do it?”

Beatrice: “Witchbeasts aren’t expected to have that much intelligence, I suppose. They’re simple, can’t do anything except what is carved into their instincts, and they think of nothing else, in fact. Animals are just like this, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I see. Very interesting——”

Beatrice, held near his bosom, gave a bitter evaluation. Nodding at those words, Subaru diverted his gaze to the flower garden and aimed to give the order to their departure—— and he noticed.

At the edge of his field of vision that contained the flower garden, a change took place, somewhere different from the flower garden.

The Watchtower glowed.

Subaru: “——Emilia!!”

Emilia: “——!?”

Immediately, Subaru raised his voice and called out to Emilia on the roof. Hearing the urgency in his voice, Emilia stiffened. But, the effect of the light exceeded that.

Subaru: “——Hk!?”

Making a violent sharp sound, the ice tower took a direct hit from something, and smashed it to pieces.

The large, slender ice tower, its height ten meters, was nothing but fragile. However, as if destroying a sandcastle, the attack broke the ice with ease, and reduced it to Mana.

——Again, he had not been able to see it. But, he understood.

Subaru: “I knew that light was an attack——”

Beatrice: “Subaru! Next one is coming!”

While his body was bathed by fragments of shattered ice, Subaru turned his neck to Beatrice's call. Immediately after that, the Watchtower shone again, as per his intuition.

The light's next blow was aimed at Subaru.

——The light would approach at a speed that did not even allow them to blink, and it would target his vital points with its single blow.

Its devastating power was already known to Subaru, who had died from it.

Therefore, the moment his brain detected that it has been targeted by the light, Death had already been determined.

Subaru: "————"

The light attacked, aiming straight for Subaru's forehead.

It was Death itself, killing its prey without a sound, only leaving behind a skewing wind. Natsuki Subaru was once again about to be killed in cold blood, with no assistance possible.

Subaru: "——E · M · M!"

Beatrice: "I suppose!"

——In this case, Natsuki Subaru was not the only one being aimed at.

A pleasant sound echoed, and the attack that should have hit Subaru, missed. The cause was simple. Subaru's strength surpassed that of the attack.

E · M · M was one of the three original spells Subaru had developed with Beatrice.

This particular one was Absolute Defense Magic.

During the activation of E · M · M, Subaru would not receive any interference from the outside world, being rendered unable to move. It was the result of applying all of Beatrice's Yin Magic skill and knowledge into manipulating time and space in a limited area around Subaru.

Subaru: "It's a bit weird realizing that the effect is similar to that asshole's—— Guah!?"

The Sin Archbishop of Greed, Regulus, could stop the effect of time on his body by transferring his heart.

E · M · M could be said to be a downsized version of that ability. Howeverthere were no harmful side effects like one's heart stopping, so a person would become invincible as long as their Mana was not exhausted.

In this situation, though, it was nothing more than buying some time.

Subaru: "But, ugh!? Just buying time!? I've got important things to do!?!?"

Beatrice: "Hey! Subaru, what are you screaming for, in fact!?r!? Are you okay, I suppose??"

Behind Subaru, Beatrice's worried voice yelled as she used his body as a shield. It was like this because even though they were protected, sound and shock were still being transmitted.

After E · M · M activation, the light of the Watchtower seemed to wonder why Subaru was not dying even after being hit again and again, so it kept bombarding him with consecutive attacks.

Subaru: "Guh!? Gah!? Ugh!?"

Its rate of fire, and the accuracy of its aim, were both extraordinary.

Although the pain and the force of the blow was one that Subaru's body did not suffer, unfortunately, it was human reflex to react with a yell upon being hit by something.

Emilia: "Subaru——! Geez… Ehh!"

Watching Subaru being showered by a concentrated attack, Emilia attempted to support him from atop the roof.

Looking to protect Subaru from the Watchtower's attack, a thick and enormous ice barrier was erected from the sandy ground. Perhaps, the toughest defensive wall Emilia could create in an instant.

It was well-intentioned, a shield from the attacks targeted at Subaru, but——

Emilia: "No way!?"

Julius: "Even the ice walls do not stand a chance!"

Emilia let out a shriek and Julius a startled cry; as they could see, the ice wall was crushed in one shot.

That unbelievable power—— was not the only reason. The ice wall was struck, but somehow weakened the light enough to avoid having it hit Subaru. Much of it rebounded and struck the sand, which kicked up a white smoke.

Looking at it closely, the marks of the destruction of Emilia's ice wall showed that it had been melted, rather than pierced.

Emilia: "Heat? Did the heat, melt the ice?"

Julius: "Something fell to the ground… a needle?"

Looking at the effects of the attack, Emilia and Julius simultaneously reached different conclusions.

In the meantime, the assault resumed. Subaru was struck by a staggering number of attacks, and even though he was in an invincible state, it was exceeding their limit.

Beatrice: "Subaru! There's a problem, in fact!"

Subaru: "I'm listeni—— Ah! But I can't—— Ugh!"

Beatrice: "If things keep going the way they are, we'll be running out of Mana very soon, I suppose!"

Subaru: "Already!?"

Beatrice: "It's almost over, in fact!"

At Beatrice's cry, Subaru bit his molars while still under fire.

Of course, what Beatrice meant to say was not "Since Mana is running out, you should supply more, I suppose", but "Since Mana is running out, we should counterattack, I suppose."

Subaru: "Can you do it?"

Beatrice: "What a foolish question, I suppose!"

Beatrice did not answer his question by saying she could not. Hearing the response of his trusted partner, Subaru loosened his jaw, relieving his molars, and steeled himself.

Subaru: “The third one’s incomplete… Let’s go with the second one!”

Beatrice: “I’m going to deactivate E · M · M right after it hits!”

There was no time.

Subaru looked at Emilia, Emilia looked at him and nodded. There was no time to discuss concrete measures. But he believed it was conveyed.

Subaru: “——Guah!?”

The light set off, and again Subaru suffered a direct hit. Because E · M · M had been activated, the attack would not reach him—— it would be canceled.

Each of the original spells was a trump card that could only be used once a day. With the release of E · M · M, Subaru would lose its protective function against that light.

And they would have to fight back before the next one arrived——

Subaru: “The light——”

As if it could read Subaru’s actions, the next strike of light was even faster.

Thus far, the speed, power and frequency were obviously meant to finish off Subaru. Naturally, with Subaru’s paper-thin defense, only one direct hit would be enough to send to the other side. And so——

Emilia: “Stop—— Hk!”

A vortex of magical power was deployed in multiple manners in front of Subaru, creating walls of ice standing on the sand ground. This time, the defense was not limited to only one wall; instead, six sheets of ice walls had been conjured at the same time.

The light struck straight into those six lines of defense. It went through the first one without a hitch, the second one with ease, the third one like it was nothing.

However, there was a slight resistance on the fourth sheet, and the fifth one could endure it for only a bit. By the sixth and last one, the speed of light was clearly dulled—— but could still go through it.

The light penetrated through the sixth ice wall, and was about to pierce through the forehead of the defenseless Subaru.

——Just before it hit, a Knight's sword drew a semicircle, catching the light that had lost its speed and cutting it down.

Julius: "Unfortunately, there would be a number of women who would grieve if he is hurt——"

Rushing from the dragon carriage to this place and striking the light with a slash of his sword without minding the danger, was Julius.

Emilia's defense had weakened it, and Julius had stopped it. Even though he was slightly jealous of that combined strike, Subaru's preparation was complete.

Subaru: "Let's go! The second! Absolute Invalidation Magic, E · M · T!"

Lifting the hood that protected him from the sand, Subaru opened his mouth wide and chanted.

Then, hiding behind Subaru's back, Beatrice drained Mana from Subaru and multiplied it with her own magical power to cast new magic.

Subaru: "————"

In the next moment, a light expanded around Subaru and Beatrice, forming a spherical field of about ten meters, also encompassing the dragon carriage.

The result was the equivalent of having wrapped themselves in a transparent, invisible sphere of light.

However, the effect was tremendous.

Julius: "This is…"

In front of the astonished Julius, the Watchtower once again radiated light. Noticing it at the corner of his eyes and immediately grabbing hold of his sword, the next second, he opened his eyes wide.

The light went straight ahead, aiming directly for Subaru, but the moment it entered the field, it simply lost all its momentum. The overwhelming speed that seemingly surpassed even bullets disappeared, and the only thing remaining after it had lost its velocity and power was a strange white object, both long and slender.

It was easily brought down by a swing of Julius's sword, falling on the sand and scattering away.

Subaru: "A needle, huh?"

Julius: "Something like that. No, more than that, Subaru, this magic…"

Subaru: "Wait, wait, wait! There are heaps of things I want to talk about, but for now we have to withdraw! Get in the dragon carriage right away! Let's get out of here! We can't take too long!"

Julius: "——! Understood! Let's hurry!"

With the call of urgency, Julius jumped into the dragon carriage, taking back his questions. He took the reins immediately, and the dragon carriage turned its front towards the Sand Time.

It would be a suicidal act to go towards the Watchtower now. This was the right decision, there was no choice but to believe it.

Subaru: "Let's go! Don't get too far from me! Stay within the light!"

Emilia: "Wah, Subaru, wow! Even though there's so many lights being fired…"

Clinging on to the roof of the running dragon carriage, Emilia watched Subaru with astonishment.

It seemed like even though it had no effect, the light continued to target Subaru. But no matter how many attacks it launched, the light would simply lose its power as soon as it entered the E · M · T field, and fall into the sand as was. The invalidation is absolute.

Julius: "At any rate, it is a terrific power. Is this yours and Beatrice-sama's trump card of some sort?"

Subaru: "One of the trump cards! I'm not going to spoil it! For now, our priority should probably be getting away from the Watchtower!! No, definitely!"

Julius: “I believe it is an application of Yin Magic, invalidating the effects of Mana within the range? If that is the case, it is the natural enemy of mages… No, you are a formidable opponent for anyone who uses Mana to aid their skills.”

Subaru: “I would say, it only seems to give a relative advantage, it doesn’t make me stronger. I’ll still lose in a fair fight against a strong guy. This is the ability that I developed thinking of when I’ll give Ros-chi a black eye.”

It seemed Julius had genuinely praised him, so he felt a little better. Of course, escaping from the attack of the Watchtower also brought him relief, but in any case, it was nothing more than letting his guard down.

However, it was probably impossible to predict what letting his guard down would bring right now, even for Subaru, so no one could be blamed.

Emilia: “Subaru! Are we going back to the dunes in front of the flower garden like this?”

Subaru: “For just a short time, but yeah! We need to polish and refine our countermeasures anyhow——”

While voicing such voice, on their retreat to the swirling sandy breeze of Sand Time—— On the moment the E · M · T field touched it, the World broke.

Subaru: “Huh——?”

Beatrice: “Oh no, I suppose!”

Until then, Beatrice had been clinging to his body with relief at getting through the attacks.

Right in front of her eyes, the view of the nightly sand dunes was torn apart, causing her voice to tremble.

Beatrice: “The distortion of space is invalidated by E · M · T, in fact!”

Subaru: “Eh?”

Beatrice: “It’s like you said, I suppose! The distortion here is similar to Betty’s Door Crossing in that house. In other words, the distorted space will return to its original state!”

Subaru: “What does that mean——?”

Subaru’s question did not reach its end, only the feeling of Beatrice clinging to him remained.

Just like that, the World was torn and unraveled like paper, coming apart, and the crack in space swallowed up Patrasche with Subaru and Beatrice, and the dragon carriage with Emilia and the others.

Subaru: “Not good… Emilia!?”

Emilia: “Subaru——”

Thrown into the darkness, Subaru cried out the effect of gravity lost its hold on him.

He could not tell top from bottom from left from right. He did not know where the dragon carriage was. But he could hear Emilia’s voice echoing in response to Subaru’s cry.

Subaru: “This is——”

Bad, before he could say it, he was thrown out into the other side of the broken space.

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???: “————”

The boundary between the flower field and the sand sea was crumpled and broken, and it was seen that a small group had been swallowed in it.

???: “————”

From far, very far away, witnessing that, a shadow wriggled inside the tower.

It walked away from the window, stepped onto the cobblestones, and went down a spiral staircase.

Its steps were slow, but gradually became faster and more impatient.

Shadow: “——Found you.”

And, as if it had not spoken in many years, let out a musky murmur.

Except, no one who heard it would be mistaken, that it sounded absolutely delighted.

Shadow: “Found you.”

That much was certain.

Arc 6 Chapter 13 – Ridicule of the Sands

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 4 “Faith on the Sands”, Parts 1-2 (halfway, two final sections of WN chapter cut in LN)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Mahubrobin — Complete

——Space distorted, the world broke, and they fell straight into the rift in reality that resulted.

As if it were made of fragile thin paper, the world was easily torn apart.

Swallowed by the distorted space, Subaru’s eardrums heard no sound, a stark contrast to the magnificent visuals around him.

He only heard a voice screaming, as if someone were calling him.

Even that voice faded away as well, and before long, he could not hear it.

The feeling of someone holding his chest also disappeared, and the fingers pulling onto him detached, drifting away from him.

With no one around, abandoned in this empty place, it seemed like he had become completely alone.

While being tormented by such loneliness and sadness, Subaru’s consciousness began slowly emerging.

And then——

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???: “——How long are you going to sleep? Get up, lazy Barusu.”

Subaru: “Ahhk?”

Feeling something sharp poking at his side, Subaru got up screaming in pain at the shock.

Having jumped up reflexively, the sand clinging onto his body fell to the ground. Coughing, he spat out dirt which had gotten into his mouth.

Subaru: “Ahk! Thu! Pthu! Huh! What? What happened??”

Rubbing his eyes, he checked his surroundings as he rose to his feet. With shaky knees and a poor foothold, he got up comically. Beneath his feet, a sea of fine grains of sand yet remained.

As his consciousness returned, Subaru could determine that this was an extension of the Augria Sand Dunes. However, the view around him was not clear. Because it was dark, far too dark.

Amidst a darkness where gazing at his own hands was not possible, Subaru’s eyes caught the presence of a small artificial light.

???: “You can sleep so well in such an emergency, it is amazing. No words.”

A stern voice hit him, and the owner of the light snorted.

That which emitted the light was a type of magic stone, processed Lagmite ore had been fashioned into a tool like a lantern. Looking at the face illuminated by the light, Subaru raised his eyebrows.

Subaru: “——Ram, is that you?”

Ram: “Who else can you see? Rem? I did not expect such a lame answer.”

Subaru: “…You and Rem look alike, but it oozes from that inside that you’re not her.”

In response to Ram, who seemed harsher than usual, Subaru gives a bitter reply. Receiving the lantern from her, he looked around the area, illuminating it.

Subaru: “This place, where is it? What happened?”

Ram: “Ram also wants to know the whereabouts of this place. As for what happened, it is three times worse than what Barusu can imagine.”

Subaru: “Does that mean you expect me to be an optimist? Do you look down on pessimists?”

Ram: “In this case, I wonder which is better.”

That reply was probably accompanied by a shrug.

Even with her right next to him, it was hard to tell Ram’s appearance in the darkness, as the space illuminated by the light was awfully large. It seemed that they were in some sort of hollow space.

There was a slightly tall ceiling overhead, joined with walls that indicated the extent of its depth.

Subaru: “Can’t feel any air flow, can’t see the sky. You mean we were sent somewhere…?”

Ram: “If Beatrice-sama’s words before we were separated are true, the space distortion is the cause.”

Subaru: “Separated… That’s right, separated! Where are the others!?”

While listening to Ram’s disinterested and emotionless demeanor, his understanding caught up with reality.

Subaru moved the light from right to left, seeking figures other than Ram’s in their surroundings. However, as he searched the illuminated space, the light was not reflected by the silhouettes he so desperately wanted to see.

Ram: “As you can see, we were separated. Barusu’s magic nullified the Watchtower’s deception… The result is not clear, but maybe instead of going into the right path, we were trapped in a distorted space-time where we will wander forever.”

Subaru: “What are you saying!? Why are you so calm? This combination of us two… it’s totally *yatara*[29]!?”

With Ram’s calm explanation, Subaru’s face turned pale and so he raised his voice.

Beatrice’s cries, space breaking apart right before his eyes; he was instantly reminded of it. The rift had swallowed the entire party consisting of Subaru and the others, and dragged them into another space.

[29] Engrish flip. Means “random” (矢鱈), originally “ランダム” (random).

At that time, Subaru and Ram were both travelling along, but they should have been in different groups. Subaru was riding Patrasche, and Ram was in the dragon carriage.

Ram: “It seems that this separation did not take into account who was in contact with who, to determine who accompanies who. At the moment we entered the rift, Ram should have been hugging Rem… But it turned out like this.”

Subaru: “I was also supposed to be clinging to Beako. And yet I can’t find her… I can’t see her… No way, there’s only Ram here with me? What kind of grouping is this.”

If the condition of that separation was not contact, then was there any other reason?

Their group was composed of eight people. There was no particular common feature that only Subaru and Ram shared. Again, was the grouping completely random?

Subaru: “No, I’ll postpone guessing the conditions for now! More than that, we have to hurry and join up with everyone… No! There’s something even more important! Rem!”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “You and I are two, so it’s still good. If any of the others who were separated are with someone else, there’s still hope. But if there’s someone who’s alone, and if that’s Rem… That’s awful.”

Emilia and Julius, the only two people responsible for making up the fighting power in this party, were of no concern. Meili and Beatrice could also manage to get by alone with their respective abilities. As for Anastasia or rather Eridna, probably there was her trump card that had been used to fight back against Lust.

Although less honorable than other ones, Subaru and Ram’s combination was still manageable.

——But, Rem was a different story.

Unlike the others, Rem was unable to perform any independent actions by herself.

Even if someone was alongside her, protecting the perpetually sleeping girl would turn any kind of undertaking into a next-to-impossible task. And the worst of all, if Rem were to be completely isolated from the others, then Death would be the only thing awaiting her in this lonely sand sea.

Subaru: “It’s important for us to meet up with everyone else, but the top priority is securing Rem! I can’t leave her in such a lonely place. That’s the one thing that’s absolutely… Absolutely not good. It absolutely cannot…!”

Ram: “…Barusu.”

Subaru: “Because I said I’d bring you here… I thought that you might be able to wake up if you meet the Sage, so I did that. It’s useless. Absolutely, shit, just Rem…!”

Ram: “Barusu, calm down. Even I will lose it now…”

Subaru: “Why are you telling me to calm down? Are not you worried because Rem is missing from your memories!?”

Ram: “——Hk! There is no such thing!”

Imagining the worst possibility, Subaru started mumbling desperately about the future, and enumerating his regrets. Hearing Subaru speak, Ram could not stand it and exploded.

She grabbed the confused Subaru by his collar and pressed him hard against the sand wall behind him.

Ram: “Do you think you are the only one who cares about Rem? Do not push it too far, Barusu. Even without my true feelings, Ram is still Rem’s older sister. Do not make a fool of me.”

Subaru: “————”

Ram: “…I can still slightly feel my connection with her, so at least for now she is safe. That much is certain, so settle down for the time being.”

It was not as if that face expressed any emotion. However, seeing the unbearable unease and distress in her eyes as she tried to appear calm, Subaru loosened the tension in his shoulders. Seeing that, Ram also moved her hands. Released from being pushed on the wall, Subaru looked down in shame.

Subaru: “…My bad. I’m sorry. Really, I was the worst idiot right now.”

Ram: “That’s just as usual. If Barusu starts reflecting on his life, it’ll take a whole day. Stop wasting our time.”

Subaru: "…Uh, my bad."

Experiencing Ram's sharp tongue and emotional testimony, Subaru finally let out a single apology. Then he slapped his cheeks with all his strength, regaining his fighting spirit.

Although Ram had assured him that Rem was safe, the fear of her being alone could not be dispelled. Their situation would not change if they did not reunite with the others soon.

Subaru: "Anyway, let's rush this reunion. Ram, can't you use your connection with Rem to work out her location?"

Ram: "It's difficult. That girl is asleep, so the only thing transmitted is her heartbeat. There is another means, Clairvoyance, but… that's not too reliable."

Subaru: "Why?"

Ram: "These Sand Dunes, it's full of Witchbeasts, and there are almost no ordinary animals or plants around. Clairvoyance is not able to borrow their sights if their wavelength does not match with Ram's. It does not synchronize with the Witchbeasts. At this time, Ram is only able to borrow the eyes from Barusu's ground dragon."

Subaru: "Patrasche? No, that should be enough. I want to check if Patrasche and Gian are with someone. It'd be helpful if they were with everyone from the dragon carriage."

Ram: "…That would not be very useful."

Subaru felt frustrated at Ram's disinterested attitude, tilting his head in thought. Now was the time to collect as much information as they could to get reunited again.

And yet, he was unable to understand why Ram was hesitating here.

However, before he could touch on what she had truly meant, the answer appeared in front of them both.

Subaru: "——?"

What had suddenly passed by in the corner of his eyes, was a light. A light different from the lantern he was holding.

Immediately shivers ran through Subaru's body, as he had had a bad experience with light moving through the edge of his sight, but the light that appeared was shaken by a gentle movement, totally different from that.

The light gradually came closer, and slowly the figure became clearer,

???: "Ram-san and Natsuki-kun, it seems that yer discussion's over?"

Subaru: "——Anastasia and Patrasche?"

Hearing the familiar Kararagi dialect, Subaru's head slightly lifted in surprise. In front of him, holding a lantern apart from the one held by Subaru, and riding Patrasche's back, was Anastasia.

In response to Anastasia's question, Ram bowed while lifting the hem of her robe on the spot.

Ram: "Thank you for your consideration, Anastasia-sama. May I ask, how are the surroundings?"

Anastasia: "I just checked all the way back, but I couldn't see anyone else. Only the three of us are out here… 'n this sort-of-girl."

Ram: "Is that so?"

Anastasia: "Gotta keep yer spirits up. Might not be much comfort, tho'."

Ram: "Thank you for your concern. Oh, I see…. I shall do so."

To Anastasia on top of the dragon, Ram responded politely. From the course of the conversation, Subaru vaguely understood that Anastasia had been searching around.

But that was the extent of his satisfaction, for the lack of explanation left him displeased.

Subaru: "Hey, Ram. Weren't you and I the only ones here? What does this mean, can you explain?"

Ram: "I do not remember telling you that Ram and Barusu were alone. Barusu was the one who made that rash judgment of his own accord. Unsightly."

Subaru: “It’d be much more endearing if you said you were so worried about Rem you failed to mention it, nee-sama.”

Ram: “Haa——”

Hearing Subaru, Ram snorted her nose with her usual tone.

Feeling relieved with that attitude, Subaru then walked towards Anastasia.

Subaru: “Regardless of any deception, it’s good news that Anastasia is safe. I’m relieved.”

Anastasia: “Aren’t’cha confusin’ this deception of yers with a misunderstandin’? I’d be relieved to learn that I’m not alone. Besides, Natsuki-kun’s ground dragon, Patrasche-chan, was very helpful, a very good girl.”

Stepping on the saddle, Anastasia carefully attempted to get off Patrasche. And Patrasche immediately crouched down to help her descent.

As expected, she was a proper ground dragon. A handsome ground dragon. A female, however.

Subaru: “No one else is hiding, right? It’s genuinely just the four of us?”

Anastasia: “Includin’ Patrasche-chan, there’s no doubt that it’s the four of us. Emilia-san and Julius’d have no reason not to come forth… but, I don’t know about Meili-chan.”

Subaru: “She might’ve taken advantage of the commotion to run away, huh… You don’t have to say it.”

Picturing the girl with braided hair in his mind, Subaru thought about Meili’s options.

Just before being separated, Meili’s secret insurance in having a Witchbeast accompanying them had been exposed by Subaru. Subaru, who had Returned by Death, actually knew that Meili’s Witchbeast served to protect the dragon carriage, both from the Watchtower and flocks of attacking Courtesan Bears.

However, since that was an event that had not occurred in this loop, essentially, the only one who knew Meili’s reason for having the Sand Earthworm follow them was the girl herself.

In this particular situation, having Meili escape the group and try to leave the Sand Dunes alone would not be strange.

Subaru: “But, she won’t do that… that’s what I want to believe.”

Anastasia: “Expectations? Or should it be trust?”

Subaru: “Make what you will of it. Leaving that aside, how are the surroundings?”

Setting aside his stance on Meili, Subaru asked Anastasia to be briefed on her inspection. She put her hands in the sleeves of the robe and tilted her head, saying, “’Bout that, huh.”

Anastasia: “Judgin’ from what I saw, we’re certainly in the Sand Dunes, but… Mayhaps this place could be underground.”

Subaru: “Underground? How could there be an underground in the Sand Dunes?”

Anastasia: “Under the sand of the dunes. A cave… More of a cavity, so to speak, but the temperature’s obviously lower than above ground, and the air’s also feelin’ kinda heavy.”

Subaru nodded as the girl swung her robe in an appealing gesture, joining the front parts to keep out the cold.

Certainly, the atmosphere here felt far colder than in the earlier setting. Considering the space had a tall ceiling with the sky left unseen, it was a suitable guess.

Subaru: “Underneath the dunes. I’ve got a bad feeling about this. I pray that this isn’t a Sand Earthworm’s lair.”

Anastasia: “Uh… That’s…”

It was a plausible scenario.

In fact, they had witnessed the existence of Sand Earthworms inhabiting the ground, and given the enormity of the individual used by Meili, this cavity was just large enough for it to be possible. Considering the ecology of the eyeless Sand Earthworms, this dark space devoid of any light would be a perfect match for them.

Subaru: “I mean, this team seriously lacks combat power… Me, Ram and Anastasia, is this a special front of non-combatants!?”

Ram: “Emilia-sama’s own Knight, proudly describing himself as a non-combatant… How hopeless.”

Subaru: “I’m just stating the reality. Without Beatrice, I can’t be so conceited as to rely on my whip skills alone.”

In terms of everyone’s self-defense measures, this really was a group that lacked fighting power. Ram had restraints of her own, and Subaru lacked Beatrice, to name a few.

Ram: “By the way, what about Beatrice-sama? Do you feel any connection relating to your Contract?”

Subaru: “Unfortunately, my and Beako’s heart are strongly tied, but not in a realistic sense. No, Beatrice told me before that she could feel me, but I can’t.”

Ram: “Useless.”

Subaru: “Shut up.”

As Ram sighed and looked away, Subaru discreetly zoomed his face closer to Anastasia. As he murmured towards her calm profile,

Subaru: “So, can you fight? What do you say?”

“Anastasia”: “——If it comes to it, of course I will fight no matter what. But it will shorten Ana’s life. I would prefer avoiding it as much as possible. I will be relying on you guys.”

Subaru: “Those expectations probably won’t be met. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or bad.”

For a moment, Subaru snorted at Anastasia, who appeared as Echidna.

Then, looking at Patrasche, who quietly waited for instructions, Subaru stroked the tip of her nose with his palm. The jet-black dragon kept silent and, leaning forward, nuzzled Subaru with her hard scales.

Subaru: “It hurts, it hurts, but… it’s a relief. Emilia and Beatrice aren’t here… but I’m relieved to have you. Except, it still doesn’t make a complete group reunion.”

Ram: "——Barusu."

As he was sharing his anxieties with Patrasche, as Ram was beckoning him, he looked back at her. Then, Ram crossed her arms while facing Subaru and jerked her chin towards Anastasia.

Ram: "We cannot stand here forever. Let's move to meet up with the others. Fortunately, thanks to Anastasia, we have light. We will be moving onwards."

Subaru: "Ohh… I didn't know that the light was brought by Anastasia."

Anastasia: "Just before the dragon carriage was swallowed, I could only grab the emergency bag that was prepared by Natsuki-kun. Thanks to you, I was able to bring in the light, a knife, and some emergency food."

Anastasia pointed at Patrasche, where a small emergency bag was hanging on the saddle. It was the equipment that Subaru had prepared for the dragon carriage as a literal emergency kit.

Even if an opportunity did not occur in which its use was necessary, he felt relieved that he had thought of it.

Subaru: "You shouldn't make fun of the wit I have in hand, after all. From now on, let's not forget to check the emergency door at any place we stay in for the first time."

Ram: "Jokes aside, it is Barusu's credit. So, a light will be given to you as a reward, so go ahead and lead the way."

Subaru: "Huuuh~… This is a reward?"

Passing him the lantern, both Ram and Anastasia got on Patrasche's back. This scene, regardless of how anyone saw it, put Subaru in the position of a servant.

Anastasia: "As a matter of fact, three people'd easily fit… There'd be plenty of room if Ram-san and I cramp in, wouldn't it?"

Ram: "Please stop there, Anastasia-sama. You can imagine Barusu would happily try to touch our bodies were he to be so close to them as to be able to touch them."

Subaru: “Off you go imagining stuff without a reason to, but if you want to be like that, I’ll imagine a lot more than that! Don’t mess with me! I’ll give you a taste of puberty!”

Raising his middle finger, he argued back, prompting a wry smile from Anastasia. Ram reacted as usual, as Subaru continued walking into the cave with a lantern in his hand.

Subaru and Ram’s light skirmish made it seem like they had forgotten the circumstances—— but it surely was a way to hide the anxiety in each respective heart, and brought just a bit of relief to their minds.

Perhaps they had both realized it, but they kept quiet.

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Although walking was a struggle, Subaru and the others were advancing through the large cave in the sand.

As expected, Patrasche was used to it, and there would not be any problem with her movement even if two heavy stones were to be put upon her back. Subaru had learned the technique for walking in the desert these past few days, and was able to proceed without much difficulty. Albeit there was the feeling of sand entering his boots.

Subaru: “The wind… I can kinda feel it, and also can’t.”

Ram: “I feel it. But given how thin this wind is, it’s still a long way from being connected to above ground.”

Along the way, wetting his finger on his tongue, Subaru tried to examine the airflow, but it was not quite clear. On the other hand, with the wind-sensitive Ram feeling it out, she concluded that the exit was still far ahead.

The way to this exit was what he wanted to give priority to, looking to meet up with his companions. Unfortunately, though, there was no indication that the signs of wind would be very reliable.

Ram: “Emilia-sama and Julius-sama should not get lost due to the guidance of the Micro Spirits. And that is why I suspect that there is malicious intent in the selection of this grouping.”

Subaru: “Well, it’s quite useful to be guided by a Micro Spirit. Damn, in my case, Beako’s so strong that she keeps the Micro Spirits away. She’s far beyond their capacity.”

What became clear was that Emilia and Julius had advantages outside the battlefield as well.

When setting out to look for a lost member, the search may not go as smoothly if they are left to do whatever they feel. They could only try not to overlook anything around them as much as possible while proceeding.

Anastasia: “Before Natsuki-kun woke up, Ram-san… seemed considerably shaken. She could not find Rem-san, but seems to be hiding it behind her attitude now.”

Subaru: “…Is that so.”

Secretly, Anastasia shared this anecdote, which made his fight with Ram after waking up feeling more and more awkward.

Subaru had spent the past year alongside Ram, after she had the memories of her sister completely erased. Any connection those two previously had must have left behind some remains after being wiped. If no one else, Subaru at least had to believe so.

“Anastasia”: “Well, it is not fun seeing you huddled up all gloomy and miserable like that, so why not look ahead if you are so down about it? If you do not, you might miss something important.”

Subaru: “…Don’t throw me off like that. You, stop giving me those nice words. You’re taking after your creator, enticing people like that.”

“Anastasia”: “Sooner or later, I wish you would start thinking of me separately from my creator. Girls will not like you if you are so insistent. This is something I have picked up with time.”

Subaru: “I don’t know any other approach. I’ll keep it in a corner of my mind.”

The tongue-in-cheek talkative exchange seemed to distract from the impatience and anxiety of not making any progress.

In the midst of that conversation, the party advanced through the large cave. Nothing really changed about the sand path and the sand walls—— while walking along that path, there were a few things to think about. That was,

Subaru: “Even though I said to be wary that this might be a Witchbeast nest… We have yet to run into a Witchbeast.”

Ram: “That is what Ram is concerned about.”

Kicking the sand under his feet, Subaru grumbled at Ram as she expressed a similar opinion.

They continued into the large cave, and soon an hour had already passed. With no one and nothing around, their anxiety, impatience and bad premonitions continued to grow.

Of course, not having enemies show up was a welcome situation, but the extensive silence could not be of any help in wiping out the bad feelings regarding this place—— It was much like being detached from the whole world.

Subaru: “No way, we couldn’t have been swallowed by a hyperspace that does not connect to anywhere, right?”

Anastasia: “Well then, would’cha tell me where the wind we’re relying on’s comin’ from? Do ya think it’s the heavy breathing of an unusually big and ferocious Witchbeast who owns this cave?”

Subaru: “That’s not even funny, it’s rather scary.”

In fact, it would not be surprising if that happened. They had already seen it with their own eyes that even the world could be broken apart. Whatever this rift was connected to, it would not be worth a surprise.

Ram: “Regardless of the maliciousness of this selection, it is hard to believe that whoever set it up had considered it could be broken. We were not aiming for such a thing with the negation spell, it was just a coincidence.”

Subaru: “What do you mean, precisely?”

Ram: “It is useless to imagine the worst scenario that this road, as it is, is connected to a Witchbeast’s stomach—— Look, observe.”

The lack of progress was leading to pessimistic theories, which Ram rationally rejected. Then, at the end of the explanation, she urged Subaru to look ahead, him having stopped.

Following her indication, Subaru held out the lantern to look forward. Then, the illuminated passage of the cavity became narrow, in front of their eyes——

Subaru: “It’s a fork.”

Anastasia: “Right or left, we gotta make a choice. What do we do?”

Subaru: “From what I know, Kurapika[30] said to choose right when the time called for it.”

Anastasia: “Who’s that?”

Looking at it in practical terms, he remembered hearing that people tended to unconsciously choose to proceed left when they got lost. Perhaps it had to do with dominance, such as the dominant hand, dominant leg, and other complicated factors like those; that was said to be one way of thinking about it.

For that reason, Subaru wanted to follow the theory of an intellectual character he once knew and chose the right path which he thought was correct, but——

Ram: “So, Barusu, which way do you want to go?”

Subaru: “…Honestly speaking, left.”

Ram: “What happened to Kurapika?”

Anastasia: “Who’s that?”

Subaru replied, Ram asked question after question, and Anastasia just poked fun.

[30] Hunter x Hunter reference.

If the words were taken at face value, then the exchange could be interpreted as such.

——But in reality, the three people who exchanged words had a stiff expression and worrisome looks on their faces. On top of that, even Patrasche, unable to speak, was staring at the right path with stern eyes.

The cause was the overwhelming negativity they were feeling from the right path. Abstractly speaking, they felt a detestable premonition. If more words were to be used, what they felt was more like dread.

Their instincts were ringing the alarm bell. Selecting the right path, would be deadly.

Subaru: “The right… I think it’s dangerous. I have a feeling it’s not going to be pleasant.”

Ram: “Surprisingly, I agree with Barusu. What you think Anastasia-sama?”

Anastasia: “If done the Kararagi way, majority wins, by the support of two votes… Besides, I’m honestly lackin’ the courage to choose the right side.”

As no sleeves would swing, Anastasia made the gesture of swinging both hands as the answer for everyone.

Subaru was not the only one. Ram and Anastasia both felt a strange sensation from the right path; Patrasche did as well. Therefore, the right road could not be chosen.

Subaru: “Then, left it is… that also feels like choosing a terrible option though.”

Ram: “So, turning back? There is nothing to gain in such a manner.”

Subaru: “There’s nothing to lose, that’s what you’re saying, I might just be overly negative.”

As Subaru failed to make a decision, Ram and Anastasia seemed ready to jump in.

Reluctantly shrugging his shoulders, Subaru stepped forth, walking in front of Patrasche. Straight towards the road on the left.

Despite his hesitation, by proceeding in that direction, the path on the right would deviate greatly from the large cavity. He found that the pressure that he felt through the walls of sand kept disappearing further and further, and the stiffness in his shoulders was naturally released.

Ram: "——What an unpleasant place."

She felt the same thing, and as he heard Ram murmuring, Subaru agreed in silence.

At this crossroads, the right path caused overwhelming negative thoughts. They chose the left road out of something like instinct to avoid the other, but there was one more reason.

——Inside his chest, Subaru felt the presence of something shouting in joy towards the right path.

It would be dreadful to obey what it declared.

It was also undeniably a major factor as to why Subaru did not opt for that road.

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Team Non-Combatant traipsed through the cave, and a few more hours passed after that fork.

Subaru: "————"

Anastasia: "————"

Ram: "————"

As they slowly advanced their search in the great cavern, the number of words spoken between the three dropped drastically.

With their fatigue, and not to mention the darkness, any sense of time was fuzzy, but what was truly wearing down their spirit along the walk was silence.

In fact, Subaru felt like several hours had passed, but he did not know if it was true. There was the possibility that they had utilized the time better than they thought, or even that they had completely squandered it.

What they knew for sure, was that there was no progress, no more than that.

Subaru: “…At that split, I wonder if we should have gone right.”

Ram: “After that much silence, you can only think to complain? Stop it. It’s shameful.”

Murmuring, he moved his dry lips to complain, and Ram bitterly delivered a stab.

However, her poison also lacked ambition. Not being able to find anything, it caused her to also be slightly dominated by anxiety.

Although the foothold along that path of sand was shoddy, there was some confidence that they had already walked for a few kilometers. So with no end to the cave in sight, it could not be helped that they would be swept over by a bad feeling. It was natural that one would doubt that the wrong choice had been made.

Even more, if they reached a dead end, they would give up and turn back.

Subaru: “The barrage of lights above ground… What do you think it was?”

Subaru changed the direction of the topic, for fear that the negative conversation would continue as it was.

The topic that turned up was the light of the Watchtower that had triggered this situation in the first place—— the defense mechanism of the dunes, which was believed to have been prepared by the Sage.

Ram: “It was a needle.”

Subaru: “A needle?”

To that question, Ram responded curtly. She spilled a sigh at Subaru’s follow-up question and gently stroked her pink hair,

Ram: “I do not know its principle in detail, but long and narrow needles enchanted with magic were being fired. The needles carried high heat, probably the effect of firing magic. But the needle itself seemed to be of special manufacture. As it was repelled and fell on the sand, it disintegrated and disappeared.”

Subaru: "…You got such a good glance at it, during all that uproar."

Ram: "A quick glance would tell you that much."

Without a doubt, it seemed Ram's observation power was not as ordinary as she claimed it to be. In fact, with Subaru just staring at her, Anastasia shook her head in amazement.

In Ram's case, she was aware of her own talents, but was still speaking sarcastically. Despite that, it was quite the analysis.

Subaru: "What do you think was the purpose?"

Ram: "Kill those approaching the Watchtower… it is a mystery why it relentlessly aimed at Barusu. It's standard practice to take down the weaker enemies first, so that might be it."

Subaru: "Crap, I can't deny it!"

It would be only natural to arrive at the same conclusion when taking a bird's-eye look at it. Nonetheless, thanks to that, there had been no casualties among those of the party.

The conclusion to be reached here, was that it was good to have a weak Subaru donning invincible magic. But in that case——

Subaru: "It means, a friendly encounter with the Sage would be difficult."

Anastasia: "I think it's premature to say so. Lookin' at it from their point of view, they didn't know who we were nor what we wanted, right? There's a chance for a discussion to occur, it's what I think."

Ram: "At worst, our business is with the Sage's knowledge, and not their personality. If they do not speak, you can just tie them up and make them taste an adequate level of pain until they do."

Subaru: "Nee-sama, was that your villainous side talking!?"

Ram: "If there is something you want, take measures. This is not mere child's play."

Ram remained strangely calm in the face of Subaru's astonishment. Just hearing those statements, he felt he was being reminded of how innocent and shallow his own resolutions were.

Regardless of whether it was actually put into practice, there was no doubt that Ram was prepared for it. That was naught but proof that she was serious about Rem.

Subaru: "————"

To touch Ram's resolve, Subaru would be required to make some decisions regarding his own resolutions.

He had not thought of getting his hands dirty for Rem. Rem was not to be blamed for that either.

What he had to do was to be prepared to reap the results.

When confronted with the existence of the Sage, no matter what kind of opponent that is, he must be absolutely determined—— He must be resolved to that degree.

Patrasche: "————"

Subaru: "Patrasche?"

At the same time Subaru bit his lips with those thoughts, Patrasche held her breath.

The ground dragon was glaring at the path with squinted eyes and neighed a little. Having noticed that stare, Subaru also stopped his feet and returned to soothe the ground dragon. He stroked the back of her neck and called out, "What's wrong?".

Subaru: "Did you see something? What…"

Ram: "——The reason would be this."

On Patrasche's behalf spoke Ram, interrupting Subaru. Anastasia frowned and looked at the passage, imitating Patrasche.

Of course, nothing could be seen anything within the extent of that darkness, but a different feeling was being stimulated rather than sight—— Seeping into their nasal orifices was a smell of something burning.

Anastasia: "…Don't'cha think it smells like fire?"

Ram: "I cannot think of anything else. But I do not think something like a kitchen could possibly be here."

Subaru: “If this is fire… The cause behind this smell is civilized people, right?”

Ram & Anastasia: “————”

At Subaru’s clinging question, neither Ram nor Anastasia could just easily nod.

He could also understand the girls’ judgment. But the smell that was drifting was clearly a scent of something supposedly burning. Ram said it was something like cooking; the aroma wafting through the air was similar enough.

A bonfire, or a stew for a meal. If that was the case,

Subaru: “Do you think there’s a possibility of that being Emilia and the others?”

Anastasia: “Assumin’ they were sent to the same place, there’s enough possibility. Nevertheless, whether it’s rational or unwise to use fire in such situation, I’d leave that judgement up to the others.”

Subaru: “————”

Even if discussed here, the answer regarding who aid ahead of the road would not arrive.

The idea of beckoning and checking the intents of the other party came to mind, but——

Anastasia: “Even if they’re at the end of the path it doesn’t mean they’re friendly.”

Supposing it was not Emilia and the others, could it be the Sage? It was hard to believe that the Sage who should be in the Watchtower would come down, but it was not unlikely.

In that case, if the Sage continued to be hostile, a corresponding assault was also to be expected.

Subaru: “…Hide the light and move forward? What I mean is, if they’re using fire then there’s light on their side. We, at least, should hide.”

Anastasia: “It’s strange to keep speculatin’ about it. We also gotta check what’s the cause, so I think it’s a reasonable idea.”

Anastasia nodded to Subaru’s proposal, and after that, Ram also quietly agreed with it.

When the lights of the two lanterns were turned off, the party went back to the path where the smell of fire was drifting from, relying only on Subaru's light.

Ram: "Barusu."

Subaru: "What?"

Ram: "If anything happens to you, we will leave you here and run away. Try not to hold a grudge."

Subaru: "If you do that I'll curse you."

Ram's words were those of encouragement, perhaps because she knew he would be fearful.

In the light held by Subaru, Ram slightly loosened her lips, and Subaru went straight through the passage. Feeling Patrasche's breath behind him, the scent of the fire gradually grew more intense,

Subaru: "——! It's the light."

Beyond the passage, he found a slightly shimmering red light.

Subaru immediately darkened his own light and instructed the three behind him to be silent. Then he squatted down and stepped on the sand stealthily to confirm the existence of the light.

One step, two steps—— as he moved forward, he could see that the light was on the other side of a corner. The passage was slightly bent to the left, and the fire was just beyond there.

Subaru: "————"

Quietly reaching the bend, he took a peek at the other side ever so slightly while leaning against the wall. At that moment, a wind carrying a slight heat tickled Subaru's forehead and he unintentionally closed his eyes.

——Immediately after, Subaru's footing dug into the soil unexpectedly, the sand slid, and his body rolled down.

Subaru: "Wha——!?"

Incapable of withstanding that surprise, Subaru forgot to hold on and rolled down the slope. The fine particles of sand were hard to grab on to, and so he slid all the way down to the bottom.

Plunging head-first into a pile of sand after rolling down a steep incline of about ten meters of height, Subaru again spat out sand and raised his body.

Subaru: “Ugh! Thu! Again sand… No, that then…”

Subaru shook his head and looked around. With the shock, he had dropped his lantern. As it was nearby, he started searching for it, stretching his hand, and he touched something hard.

For an instant, he thought he had found the lantern, but it felt different compared to the hardness what he had held. The surface was crisp and pleasant to touch, like a wooden stick. Despite its thickness and length, he judged it light when lifting it up.

Subaru: “What is it…?”

In that pitch-black darkness, even getting closer to it and straining his eyes would not relay to him its identity.

Smelling it timidly, the smell of charcoal was felt——

Subaru: “————”

The very next moment after he thought that, a light appeared behind him suddenly.

The wisps that appeared in the background were red, shimmering and primitive, their name flames. Then, as the flames began to light up the world, Subaru saw the true identity of the thing he had grabbed.

——Probably, it was a creature’s foot.

Something that had once been an animal, burned until it turned into charred remains.

And around the place where Subaru was sitting, the remnants of former creatures that had become lumps of charcoal were scattered; Subaru had slipped right into the middle of countless, burned, dead bodies.

Subaru: “Ohh! Ah! AHH!?”

Throwing away the charred waste in his hand, Subaru aimed to retreat. However, a terrible flame existed at his rear, and his neck was burned by the heat wave, and this time, he fell down just on his face. And finally, he turned back and looked at it directly.

???: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!"

Subaru was thrown out of reality, facing a tremendous roar from his front.

Why were all the Witchbeasts' roars so disgusting as to irritate human beings to the limit of their disgust?

With such a high-pitched roar, it was like countless babies were crying all at once.

It was a blasphemous creature that Subaru had never seen, it burned red in a place full of burned bodies—— it truly was a Witchbeast, but the color of its fur was different from what he had seen in the past.

As far as Subaru knew, all the Witchbeasts were distorted and ugly, but they were often in a form such that they bore a resemblance to an existing creature somehow.

That applied all the same for the White Whale or the Great Rabbit. For all cases, there was a basic foundation of an animal.

However, this time, he did not wish to apply the same concept to the Witchbeast that existed in front of him.

Witchbeast: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!"

The Witchbeast, once again, cried out. At first glance, some similarities could be found with a horse.

Thin, but strong legs of a quadruped, that existed to charge over the earth. It was the same as a horse, in that it possessed a trunk supported by its four legs and a long tail swaying from its rear.

However, there was a human torso in the part where the horse's neck should normally be, leading to the head. Compounding on the four legs, the human torso possessed two further arms. And there was no head above the neck of the human torso. As from the neck to the top, a Horn protruded.

It was the mark of a Witchbeast, a mark that branded it as something decisively different from other animals.

In place of its head, a horn grew. It possessed a head not. But if that were the case, where was the mouth from which its cry was raised? From the chest till the belly of the human torso, was a vertical gash, and inside the oral cavity, were fully-grown fangs aligned horizontally, asserting their existence.

Subaru: "…A monster."

Even calling it a Witchbeast was somewhat absurd; rather it was a blasphemy of life.

To Subaru's knowledge, it was close to a creature of fantasy called Centaur, half-man and half-horse, but that was a distorted figure, as if its production had been abandoned half-way.

From the back side of the human torso of the Centaur grew a mane of flame torso searing the sand cave with incredible power, red light urging forth.

Considering the strength of that blaze, who had created all the charred carcasses that lay around the place became clear. Using fire meant civilized people or whatever; it had been a mistake to embrace such expectations.

Subaru: "————"

The arms of the human part of the Centaur were that of a human, with five fingers.

The legs of the horse part of the Centaur were that of a horse, with hoofs having been formed.

The figure was about six or seven meters long, just about the right size to pass through the cavern—— that was to say, the master of the cavern was this being in front of him——

Subaru: "…It was, a trap."

Holding his breath, Subaru despaired.

There was nothing he could do. He quickly turned his hand to the back of his waist and grabbed the handle of the whip, but he did not believe he could do anything with it.

And to that breathless Subaru, the Centaur tilted his eyeless head. From its mouth was hurled a bellow, inciting fear.

Witchbeast: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!"

At that moment, Subaru moved to create a gap.

He turned around on the sand, roughly kicked one of the charcoaled debris onto the Centaur. Having been cooked to a crisp on the inside, the corpses had no power to them, even if they connected. But still, it was good to be in control. Clinging to the steep slope, he attempted to return to the upper passage. He would go back the road he came, but he did not mind it. The problem was, how far this Centaur was going to give chase was unknown. Given that it burnt its prey in this manner, it was dubious whether it had an appetite. Of course, this was not necessarily a good thing, as he had heard that Witchbeasts possessed an instinct to hurt and murder human beings. Still, if there was a possibility that the situation to look up for a little bit, it would——

Subaru: "Kafuu——"

While thinking so much about it, Subaru noticed that his body was not trembling.

Trying and creating a diversion by kicking a piece of charred debris, and climbing the steep sand slope and turning back, and reaching out to his whip, Subaru could do none of this.

——Because before he could get to it, the breath of the Witchbeast burned Subaru.

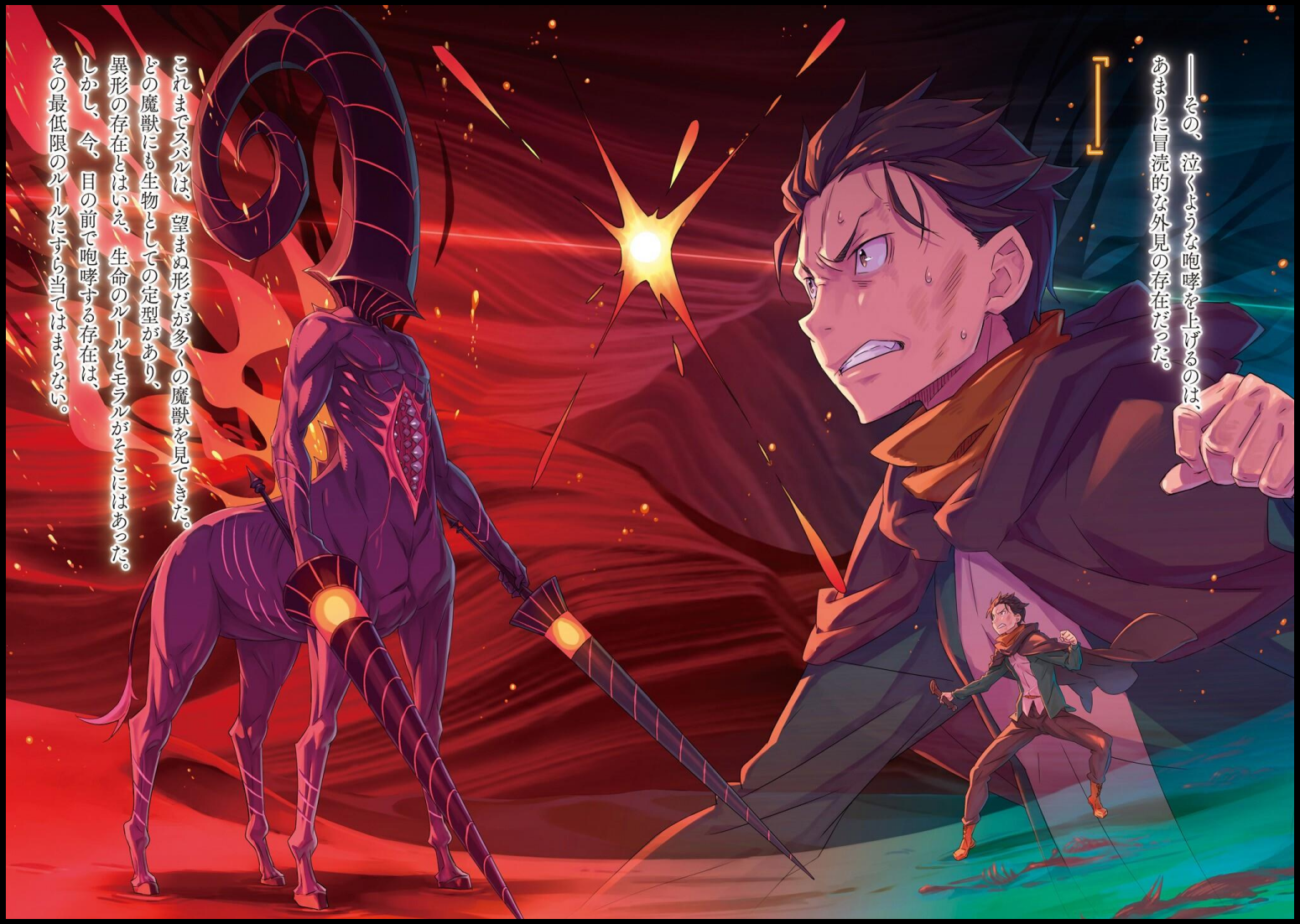
Subaru: "——Ah."

As soon as the conception reached that his whole body was being burnt, Subaru screamed in pain and suffering. However, perhaps because his throat was being burnt, his lungs were having their oxygen burnt, not a bit of his voice could be raised.

Where the burned skin formed bubbles, they swelled and burst instantly. The fluids that had flown inside the body, which he had never seen before, instantly evaporated, his blood actually boiling.

Subaru: "————"

Never mind rolling over on the ground in this suffering.


――その、泣くような咆哮を上げるのは、
あまりに冒涜的な外見の存在だった。
「
これまでスバルは、望まぬ形だが多くの魔獣を見てきた。
どの魔獣にも生物としての定型があり、
異形の存在とはいえ、生命のルールとモラルがそこにはあった。
しかし、今、目の前で咆哮する存在は、
その最低限のルールにすら当てはまらない。

The muscles and fat had been burnt, melted and charcoaled. The pain disappeared to a place far away, and Subaru experienced an illusion of being drowned in flames.

Burned. Yes, burned. He had read somewhere about burns in-depth.

He had learned that there were several stages of burns, and that once the third stage was reached, the scars would remain, and a skin graft would be necessary. He also had learned that if thirty percent of a person's body were burnt, breathing would be made difficult, leading to death.

Subaru: "————"

Body hair burnt till the folicule, eardrum and brain matter alike melted and flowed out the earlobe. Lips and gums evaporated, exposing the teeth, and the tongue was gulped by the suffering of the heat wave. It did not matter. He had already drowned. These burns, could they be healed? Even though he was not confident regarding his face, if it got burnt, would they like him less? Emilia, Beatrice, Rem.

???: "——rusu!"

Burning, his field of vision was burning. Everything was burning, turning red, and going white. Blood was eradicated by the tremendous heat, the eyelids melted away, the fluids of the eyeballs evaporated, it turned white and cloudy, and nothing could be seen.

He had just heard something. He had heard someone calling. He had heard babies crying. Someone came down beside him. Idiot. Why had they? They had said they would run away. Why had they come down here? But, going down, what did that mean? Moreover, what was left or right?

A horse, a human. Different. Hot. It melted, it burned, sleepiness.

Melted and disappeared——

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???: "——How long are you going to sleep? Get up, lazy Barusu."

Subaru: "Guah, uh!?"

Subaru was pulled back to reality with a sharp poke, his limbs unable to move, and his scorched thoughts crumbled away.

Suddenly raising his body, Subaru wiped cold sweat from his sand-laden forehead.

Subaru: “Eh, oh… eh?”

Looking around. Dark, he was unable to see anything. There was something that evoked fear just a few seconds ago.

Subaru: “Hii?”

Ram: “…I am stunned. How can you be frightened from mere darkness? You are not a child.”

Subaru: “——Ah.”

Cowering, this small Subaru’s eyes widened at the sound of that voice.

Her face illuminated by the lantern she herself carried, from Ram spilled a slight exhale. Then, she quietly knelt down on the spot, and stroked Subaru’s cheeks with her hand.

Ram: “What a pitiful face.”

Subaru: “…Has my face melted?”

Ram: “——Except in front of Emilia-sama, I have never seen such a pitiful sight.”

The heat of the palm touching the cheek was so warm, but it was not even close, compared to what Subaru had just experienced.

Thanks to that feeling, thanks to the sensation of flames and the warmth of another, Subaru understood.

Again, he had Returned by Death. And here was another save point, different from that of the two Deaths he had met in the Sand Dunes.

So it had been said, that to conquer the labyrinth of sand one had to put their very lives at stake.

——He felt like the cold sand flowing on the sand sea was silently ridiculing the scorched Subaru, watching.

Arc 6 Chapter 14 – Faith Built Upon the Sand

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 4 “Faith on the Sands”, Parts 2 (halfway)-4 (around 25%)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

The warmth coming off from Ram’s palm contrasted with the ridicule of the cold sand. Both of those were the realities which Natsuki Subaru was faced with now; that was the Present that he should accept.

Subaru: “…Ram.”

Ram: “What?”

Subaru: “Your fingers sure do feel nice and smooth… It’s as—— Buehhh!”

Ram: “This Barusu sure pushes his luck, doesn’t he?”

Subaru: “Will you ever stop using people’s nicknames as curses!?”

Subaru voiced out his complaints with tears in his eyes after having had his cheeks slapped in recompense for his careless remark. However, Ram, who held a lantern in her hand, did not reply to him. Instead, she hurriedly moved off, keeping her distance away from him.

It was something cold from her, even though up until now, she had shown him a kindness which was seldom seen—— Though, if things stayed like this, Subaru would be unable to even have an awkward conversation about it. Part of his true intention had been to go back to how they usually interacted.

Subaru: “Right here, we’re…”

Ram: “It is pitch-black absolutely everywhere. You remember the crevices opening up in the sand sea, and our dragon carriages being swallowed up by them, I presume? I do not want to have to explain more than that.”

Subaru: “Nono, I’m fine with hearing just that. I get it.”

Ram: “…Okay.”

Subaru received an outline of the current situation from Ram as he took a deep breath. He understood that he had Returned by Death and that the point he would Return by Death to had been changed already.

——This made it three times that Subaru had met Death in the Sand Dunes.

Twice he had been killed above-ground, which had likely happened because of the white flashes fired from the Watchtower. However, this time, this third time was far different to the other two. He had died from being attacked by a monster at the underground.

He could barely keep his body from shaking as he recalled the manner of his death that he had experienced just a minute ago.

Subaru: “I never thought I’d die like that…”

The manner in which Subaru had died just now was what one would call a fiery death. His whole body had been scorched by crimson flames, and he had been burnt to death still without understanding everything that was going on. It was hard to forget that his whole body had been licked by red-hot tongues, and that every part of him had melted rather than burnt.

He knew from knowledge that the human body was a lump of fat. However, was it really something that melted away to a fluid so easily like that? That his burnt remains were tragic, was something which he would indeed agree with.

Ram: “Barusu, have you calmed down yet? If you have settled down, we need to talk.”

Subaru: “Ah, ahh. Yeah, I’m okay… Is it just me and you here?”

Ram: “If that was the case, Barusu, I would be ditching you and running away for my own safety. Since I have not… Well you understand what that means, don’t you?”

Subaru: “Did you just show a Part Two to the kindness you seldom show?”

Ram: “You sure do say a lot of disrespectful things towards the bundle of love and compassion which is me, don’t you? ——She came back whilst you were spouting out nonsense.”

Looking to the left of the lantern—— and then looking at where it was pointing from Ram’s right, he saw the glow of a lamplight approaching from deeper within the cave. The lantern was swaying back and forth at around head-height; and just as he expected, the source of light was held by Anastasia who was riding Patrasche.

Anastasia: “Ram-san, Natsuki-kun, it seems yer conversation’s finished, right?”

Subaru: “…Anastasia, Patrasche, is that you?”

Anastasia, who was riding on Patrasche, spoke out the same greeting as she had before as she flashed him a grin. And, to those words, Ram pinched the hem of her skirt like before and bowed.

Ram: “Thank you for your thoughtfulness, Anastasia-sama. May I ask, what do the surroundings look like?”

Anastasia: “I just went to look a lil’ further inside, but I couldn’t find any of the other young’uns. Only the three of us were hurled down round here… ‘n this young’un right here.”

Ram: “I see.”

Anastasia: “Ya gotta keep yer chin up, though mayhaps that in itself ain’t gonna be of any use to us.”

Ram: “Thank you for your concern. Indeed, I understand… I will make sure to do so.”

Anastasia voiced her apprehensions from dragon-back. To which, Ram replied in the likeness of how she would usually speak, different to how she spoke to Subaru. Anastasia’s face was clearly visible this time since Ram was the one holding the lantern.

Everything Anastasia had said was exactly the same as last time[31]. The fact that Ram was upset at being separated from Rem was clearly shown from her face in profile, in which the slight exhaustion was visible.

[31] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “In the Japanese it certainly is, but I may have translated things differently to Chapter 13 since that Chapter had a different translator.”

Subaru: “So for now, the only ones that were able to join up is just us four… Pretty damn awful that we have no fighting strength.”

Anastasia: “You’re not as distraught as I thought, eh, Natsuki-kun? What special good luck charm did’cha even get Ram-san to cast on ya?”

Ram: “Unfortunately, nothing would happen if you leave Ram and Barusu alone together. Only that it would end up with Barusu being found dead the next day.”

Subaru: “What do you mean? Do you mean like the werewolf in a game of werewolf? Scary.”

Their comments were not meant as a show of bravado, but rather, Anastasia and Ram exchanged words in such a way as to calm Subaru, who had just woken up. Though his grasp of the situation was quick since it was the second time around, they were still in a place where it paid dividends in getting a move on immediately, even now.

Subaru: “Ram, just to make sure, you don’t know where Rem is using your Synesthesia, right?”

Ram: “That is correct, it is not working. Since I feel the link, I have no doubt that at least she is alive… But, I do not know any more than that. All we can do is pray that she is not alone.”

Subaru: “Given that my everyday deeds are tied to fortune and misfortune, Rem’s deeds will just be good ones, make no mistake in that… I absolutely believe in her safety.”

Were this theory to be right, it was entirely because of his own deeds that he was going through an absurd amount of suffering and death. He wanted to go and close his eyes to that.

Subaru: “On top of that…”

Subaru absolutely could not let Ram and Anastasia know; that was his greatest anxiety. It seemed like everyone he wanted to save had been scattered away from him thanks to his Return by Death point having been updated. It was just like when he could not make use of his Return by Death to get Rem’s name back.

What if tragedy had struck his companions because Return by Death had been updated?

Subaru: “I absolutely won’t allow that…!”

For those who weren't here. Emilia, Beatrice, Julius, Meili. And Rem. He prayed that nothing disastrous had happened to them. Natsuki Subaru prayed that they were not hurt, even if they were not in his reach.

Ram: "Barusu—— Aren't you connected with Beatrice-sama?"

Subaru: "I've tried, but it's no good. As long as there's a path between us, Beako herself should be able to sense me… But even if I try to call her, the connection is pretty weak."

Anastasia: "Might be due to the Miasma. Even Spirits can't keep their breath held long, even my Echidna's grumblin' every so often… It was just Emilia-san who was fine with it."

Subaru: "I guess it was the same for you as well, eh, Beako?"

Beatrice, stout-hearted as she was, probably would not let out any complaints even if she was in bad condition. Were that to happen, Subaru would have absolutely noticed it. Beatrice being in a poor state would influence everyone else's safety as well. Upon their safe reunion, he would have to tell her off.

Subaru: "For that reason too, we need to rejoin with the other guys—— Let's go deeper into the cave!"

It was likely that they would come across the monster which had burned him once again if they went towards its depths.

But, even so, there was no other way but to go forward.

So, to reunite with his precious companions as well, there was no other way but to go forward.

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Anastasia: "You're the only one walkin' Natsuki-kun, ain't yer footin' gettin' worse?"

Subaru: "I'm fine. Do take care though, since Patrasche won't welcome anyone with open arms except me. Every time, it seems like she's about to bite off one of Beako's drill curls."

Anastasia: “Hahahaha, what a great joke. Patrasche-chan’s a good girl, she wouldn’t do that. Ain’t that right?”

Patrasche: “————”

Patrasche gave a quick grunt at Subaru, who was leading them lantern in hand, whilst they made their way deeper into the cave. Her grunt was the sort she made when she had no complaints.

Patrasche was still a hard worker, even despite the fact she was carrying people other than Subaru, since she knew it was an emergency. As expected, she was a woman worthy of being part of the Emilia Camp.

Having placed Ram and Anastasia on Patrasche, Subaru was the only who traversed the maze of sand on foot. They followed the same way as last time, with the four of them moving forward towards the depths of the cave. They may have left dozens of minutes earlier than last time, but since he did not know when that monster would appear at this place, it would all be down to nothing more than a margin of error.

Subaru: “Its lair is way over there… Maybe it’s its feeding ground, or its playground…”

What could not be called feed was the sheer amount of burnt corpses which had littered that area. The charred corpse which Subaru had accidentally grabbed had probably been an animal’s—— from its shape it seemed like he had grabbed the hind-leg of a four-legged creature, but there were no indications that it had been eaten. The number of charred corpses over there had been countless.

He could even have appreciated its cuisine as being that of a Simply Gourmet Witchbeast, if it were using fire to just prepare its meal. However, it merely burnt its prey and left their corpses behind untouched. That monster possessed a cruel nature that delighted itself in burning its prey to death; it made sense that it had a way to capture it and a place to burn it.

It was a grotesque figure, armed with abnormal amounts of heat. Subaru also feared the Witchbeast itself, which existed with form wrong for a living creature, at the same time as he recalled the moment he had burned to death.

Anastasia: “…From what I can see, we should still be in the Sand Dunes ‘round here, but maybe underneath it. What do ya think, Natsuki-kun?”

Subaru: “————”

Anastasia: “Natsuki-kun?”

Subaru: “Eh? Ah? Ahh, that’s right. I think so too.”

Ram: “Did you actually hear what she said? You are being rude if you think that response adequate.”

Ram swiftly exposed Subaru’s mindless agreement. However, Subaru hastily shook his hands and head in denial.

Subaru: “No way, I heard everything properly. And what’s more is that I’m sticking with my stance of absolute agreement.”

Ram: “Really, when you take off your bra when you go to bed, your breasts don’t sag an inch, is that what you’re saying[32]? You’re affirming it? Disgusting.”

Subaru: “Isn’t the way you’re bringing that up to me disgusting!? Or rather, it’s not like what she’s saying, don’t you agree with me!?”

Subaru, in a state of disbelief, turned towards Anastasia for help. She gave him a wry smile, and then spoke out saying, “Ya shouldn’t worry”,

Anastasia: “Ram-san was messin’ about just now. I don’t think it proper to speak like this in such a terrible situation.”

Subaru: “Y-yeah? Yeah, that’s right. I was in a hurry. And in the first place, neither Ram nor Anastasia’s breasts would sag, nor do they have enough to even notice…”

Anastasia: “Whoopsy, sorry, Natsuki-kun. My hand slipped.”

Subaru: “Why the past tense, and why so hot!?”

Her lantern was pressed to the nape of his neck, and the heat coming off from the magic stone burnt his neck. With the sensation of his fiery death resuscitated within him, he shuddered and rolled down onto the cold sand, shouting and screaming as he relieved himself from the pain. And as he did so, still

[32] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “That’s what Ram is saying roughly in Japanese; she’s basically calling Subaru a bullshitter with this colorful anecdote.”

collapsed with the back of his body lying on top of the sand, he glared at the two of them on dragon-back.

Subaru: “I-isn’t it cruel doing that all of a sudden? I would have liked at least a chance to explain.”

Anastasia: “Ya can’t go criticisin’ people’s physical characteristics ‘n then showing contempt for ‘em. Ya absolutely can’t do that unless yer masochistic. If this were Kararagi, ya’d lose all yer reputation ‘n become broke. Don’t’cha agree, Ram-san?”

Ram: “Ram pays that no mind. Besides, Rem’s are bigger, so the balance between us is kept. It is no issue for me.”

If he went and spoke out on their beautiful sisterly love which complemented each other, he would once again provoke their ire. Thus, he kept quiet. Subaru grimaced, his nape tingled in slight pain. He stood up and coughed, brushing away sand.

Subaru: “Anyways, let’s get down to business. We’re underground here, that’s what you said right?”

Anastasia: “What, y’actually heard me? That’s right, I think so. The reason why is ‘cause the air’s heavier than above ground, ‘n the temperature’s lower. Don’t’cha agree?”

Ram: “Underneath the Sand Dunes… We must pray that this is not a Sand Earthworm’s burrow.”

Subaru: “…It could also be worse than that.”

Anastasia pulled her robe in tighter, appealing to the chill, a gesture which Ram followed suit in. Subaru subtly weaved in the reality of the situation, while he agreed with their opinions.

Of course, even if there were Sand Earthworms here, it would be a herculean task to beat them back with the meager fighting strength they had available amongst them. Even so, Sand Earthworms were still better as they somewhat had a strategy to deal with them.

That Witchbeast—— which for the moment being he would call a Centaur for convenience, was something which Subaru had no idea of how to deal with in battle. He had come across it and been immediately burnt on the spot.

He was sure he would meet the same manner of death, if he bumped into it like last time.

Subaru: “Practically, it’s likely we’ll come across Witchbeasts other than the Sand Earthworms. Even though they’re Witchbeasts which roam these sand dunes, I think it’s a good idea if we came up with a plan for them for later.”

Ram: “Yes… Nonetheless, Ram can only say she merely knows what was heard from Meili on the way here. And other than that, perhaps how a typical Witchbeast lives.”

Anastasia: “The Witchbeasts of the Augria Sand Dunes are far more aggressive due to the effects of the Miasma, and there are also Witchbeasts that shouldn’t be livin’ here in the first place. Even so, knowin’ is better than not knowin’.”

When Subaru put out his suggestion, Ram and Anastasia both nodded in agreement. As a result, they talked about the Witchbeasts whilst they continued their search forward into the depths of the cave.

Ram: “Sand Earthworms stand out due to their stench and ugliness, but in contrast to their aggressive nature, their bodies are not that strong. Even if their bodies are large, my magic can kill them easily… If anything, your whip may actually be useful, Barusu.”

Subaru: “Seriously? My whip would damage them?”

Anastasia: “It’s said they tend to be cowardly, ‘n it seems if they feel pain, they’d back away. It’d depend on the type of pain they’d feel, but at least the chance ain’t zero, wouldn’t’cha hink?”

Ram: “I don’t want to come across a Banassi, if possible.”

Subaru: “Is that a vicious Witchbeast despite it having «rodent» in its name[33]?”

Anastasia: “Nah, it ain’t got any fighting strength. Buuut, it fights dirty. It puffs itself up until its body goes «kapow», blowin’ up anyone near it. ‘N with that, its blood ‘n guts will shower its enemy. “

Subaru: “…Then, is its blood poisonous or something?”

[33] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “«袋鼠» is the Kanji for «Banassi», which is a term used for marsupials. Tappei gave them special Furagana in an Ask.fm post from years ago, which is reflected on both the English and Japanese Wikia (バーナッシ). But since the character «鼠» stands for mouse, Subaru mentions the word «rodent».”

Ram: “It is not like that. It is just pestering… But, once one of them does that and their stench pours out, other Banassi flock over and do the same thing. You end up becoming smeared in blood.”

Subaru: “Scary!”

As expected, there were a lot of Witchbeasts unfamiliar to him, and there were many things which made him want to frown when listening to their composition. After they finished their discussion on those Witchbeasts, Subaru felt like the time had come, and chose the topic.

Subaru: “So, the next one’s a Witchbeast I saw in the distance back at the Sand Dunes… Do you know a Witchbeast which has a human body attached to the body of a horse, that spouts flames from its back?”

Ram & Anastasia: “————”

Subaru told them about the Centaur, keeping in tune with the discussion which they had had so far regarding the way of life of Witchbeasts.

It was a distinct Witchbeast. Even if this Witchbeast was one of the more aggressive varieties native to the Sand Dunes, if there was an origin to it, he should be able to make a breakthrough on it. It would be ideal if it possessed easy-to-understand weak points, such as being weak to water due to its fire——

Anastasia: “…Sorry, but I ain’t got a clue. What ‘bout ya, Ram-san?”

Ram: “Ram is sorry as well, but this Witchbeast invites only revulsion from just listening to this. “

Subaru: “You both don’t know, huh…”

However, he only got those answers from both of them. It seemed that neither of them had any knowledge of the Centaur or a different kind of them with those abnormal characteristics.

But, that was the Witchbeast they had likely first come across. He did not want to give up on finding a breakthrough with only the answers he had received now.

Subaru: “You really don’t know? Like, part of Patrasche’s head becoming a human body, and two arms sticking out from there. And a mouth stretching vertically across part of its body. And finally, a horn growing from its neck of its human body, instead of a head…”

Anastasia: “Ehhhh… What the hell. That’s sooo gross…”

Ram: “Honestly, that is so off-putting.”

The more details he put into his explanation, the more he put off the women. Seeing even Patrasche’s face looking disgusted after she received Subaru’s semblance of an explanation, Subaru dropped his shoulders in defeat.

It genuinely seemed like they all had no clue about it.

Ram: “If you happened to catch a glimpse of a Witchbeast like that in the first place, you needed to report it back then. Why did you let such a seemingly dangerous Witchbeast go by?”

Subaru: “No, that’s not… It’s because it was nighttime. Maybe it was because Meili’s Divine Protection was active, so I just saw it in the distance not approaching us from all the way over there. It was like, when you were being treated by Emilia-tan inside of the dragon carriage.”

Ram: “Disgusting.”

Subaru: “So that’s all you’re gonna be saying?”

Subaru was discouraged by the lack of a response as he fumbled around for a suitable excuse. With it ending up like this, they had no means capable of striking first against the Centaur. All he could do was search for a plan to avoid meeting the real thing whilst he spelled out its danger in anticipation.

Subaru: “For now I’ll call it a Centaur, but… I reckon it’s a really dangerous thing. A mane grew from the back of its human body, and it was burning like fire. It had quite a tenacious look to it… I don’t know how since it didn’t have a face, but that’s the feeling it gave off, so it’s likely that if we don’t take care, it’ll come and chase us.”

Ram: “Then why did you ignore it? Do you have a death wish?”

Subaru: “I think there were misleading words in the explanation right now as well.”

He couldn’t deny that his explanation had become fairly absurd in wanting to let them know of the danger. However, by telling them this as a precaution, the girls would likely be able to keep themselves on guard for danger in regards to an encounter with the Centaur in the flesh.

That was all he had managed. He had not managed to tell them about when he had really met the Centaur, and they had no counter-measures against it. Subaru thought about a more fundamental approach as well. That was——

Anastasia: "Natsuki-kun, Ram-san—— Can ya stop the chatter for just a sec?"

Anastasia said that, and motioned for Patrasche to stop. The clever ground dragon had stopped before she had been told to, but she drooped her head as if she understood what Anastasia meant.

And then, Anastasia held out her lantern in front of her and said,

Anastasia: "There's a fork in the road."

——Before his eyes was the first part of his plan to avoid meeting the Centaur.

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As before, a dread hung in the air at the fork, enough to make one grimace.

And, that dread came clearly flowing in from the right path.

Anastasia: "Left or right, which way do ya wanna go?"

Subaru: "If we follow Kurapika's theory, going to the right is the correct option[34]."

Anastasia: "Who's that?"

As before, Subaru's knowledge was nothing but foreign in this other world. Subaru had already experienced it with his body, so his words were not unsubstantiated.

Subaru: "In times like these, people tend to unconsciously want to pick the left side. Though various factors are at play like one's dominant hand or eye, ethology has shown actual evidence of that, especially when there are no additional conditions attached."

[34] Hunter x Hunter reference. Namely, one of its characters.

Ram: “Ethology, what a smart word came out of your mouth… However, are you ignoring the horrible presentiment that can be felt coming from the right path? Isn’t this a condition?”

Whether it would be correct or not to take the right path—— this time, they had to take it. Having deemed so, Subaru would have to try and persuade the others with logic, however he felt a strong feeling of aversion to the horrible sensation that was drifting in from the right path.

If they could, both Ram and Anastasia, wish not to take the right path; he could see that from the look in their eyes. Persuading them and making them take the right path was what Subaru had to do. He would not let them go towards their Death so easily after getting an opportunity by Returning by Death.

Subaru: “It’s true that a blatantly horrible atmosphere is coming from the right. But, I think it’s just a little too blatant. It’s as if it’s saying, don’t come here, right?”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “It’s exactly like the mechanism to break through Sand Time, and the flower garden of Witchbeasts before the Watchtower. They’re far too intricate to be something that cropped up naturally. Didn’t you think so?”

Anastasia: “In other words, Natsuki-kun, ya wanna say that the Sand Time, the Flower Garden and this cave as well are things of artifice?”

In contrast to Ram who had sunk into silence, Anastasia followed what Subaru had been trying to say. Subaru cracked his fingers at hearing her response and voiced his agreement with a “That’s right”,

Subaru: “They’ve set a bunch of traps since they want to keep us away. Why haven’t we come across a single Witchbeast here in nearly an hour if this wasn’t something artificial? We all seem to agree that this is part of the Augria Sand Dunes. And though Meili’s not here, we haven’t encountered any Witchbeast lairs. That’s unnatural.”

Ram: “So, this place we are now is where someone’s hand… No, where the Sage’s hand came into play.”

Subaru: “With that, we know that the Sage’s personality isn’t very pleasant.”

Ram: “————”

Although it was an opinion which was half-coated in truth, Subaru admired that even if he spoke himself, it did not mean that he had not been able to sound persuasive.

In fact, when he looked back on the journey through the Augria Sand Dunes up until now, there had been many things set which could certainly be called traps that were there to impede their journey towards the Watchtower—— They could even be called Trials[35]. And, it was a fact as well that they had not come across any Witchbeasts thus far, in this cave.

Of course, Subaru's thoughts were incorrect, as he knew that they would come across the Centaur in the end, however—— No, perhaps that Centaur was the last guard. There was a chance that its presence was a mechanism that beckoned a last show of strength to those who came to enter the Watchtower.

In that case, he just had no way to express the malice in their choice of guardian, however.

Ram: "…There is certainly logic even in Barusu's point."

Subaru: "——! Seriously?"

Anastasia: "Why are ya actin' so surprised? Is it strange?"

Subaru instinctively reacted with surprise at Ram's words, who had sunk into pensive silence. And after that, Anastasia, who had seen that response, gave a wry smile and lifted the pom-poms on her hat with both of her hands.

Anastasia: "To tell ya the truth, I really don't wanna go to the right. But, now that'cha said that our opinions have been induced to settle in pickin' the left… I don't wanna go with it anymore."

Subaru: "That's an opinion that doesn't seem like you, who lives by your do-or-die intuition. You sure have been swept away."

Anastasia: "Are ya sayin' even I'll do it if yer opinion becomes approved?"

The wry smile on her face grew deeper, which as a matter of fact, probably indicated that Eridna was unable to imitate the vital point that had been Anastasia's "Do-or-die Intuition". This was a last resort

[35] This is exactly the same Japanese expression as Petelgeuse's Ordeal and Arc 4's Trials (試練), obviously.

for her, too. She should have had a difficult time deciding whether or not to get on board with Subaru's point.

Subaru: "So, what about you Ram?"

Ram: "It is as I said. I can understand Barusu's point too, considering how things went in the Sand Dunes up until here. We can just agree that apart from the Sage's wicked disposition, there is the fact that those unable to reach the Watchtower are subject to one harsh environment after the other… That is why it is obvious that someone has meddled."

Subaru: "Mhm, I sure don't agree with calling them natural things…"

Ram: "So, although I do not fully agree with your point, Barusu, it does not mean that I do not agree with some parts of it. With that said, there is no hesitation in checking the right path."

Subaru: "…What do you mean?"

Anastasia: "It's annoyin' for her to do what Natsuki-kun says, but she's gonna go along with it, is what she's sayin'."

Anastasia politely interpreted what Ram had meant to say. In fact, it seemed like it was the correct interpretation considering that Ram didn't correct any of it. In short, it meant that both Ram and Anastasia had accepted Subaru's cajolery.

Subaru: "——Alright! Excellent, *domo arigato*[36]. I won't make either of you regret it."

Ram: "I will take at least some share of the responsibility in my choice. Do not go trying to carry my share of the burden on your back as you please. Focus your useless resourcefulness only on Rem."

Anastasia: "Ah, if ya make me regret it, I'm gonna let'cha take the responsibility for it. If that happens, we'll hafta consult the abacus for how much it's gonna cost ya, don't'cha think?"

Subaru: "Both of you are so damn scathing!"

[36] Engrish flip. Means "thank you very much" (どうもありがとう), originally "サンキュな" (thank you).

His delight was short-lived, and his speech in which he had taken responsibility for the choice was quickly assailed by the two of them. Although he did not know how serious Eridna's trace of Anastasia was, Eridna was putting in great efforts so that things would not end up in regret. Only that feeling was genuine.

Subaru: "Plus, it's not like the obstacles end with just their persuasion."

Indeed, that was right. In the end, all Subaru had obtained was the right to mount a challenge. The challenge against the real hurdles would start from here on out.

——The fork in the road awaited their decision as it exuded an overwhelming negative atmosphere out.

They were going to take the right path where the air lay thick and visible, ever worsening. If this was a Trial which the Sage had prepared, he wondered what they were thinking by opting to make this path its start.

Subaru: "If they're waiting for us beyond this point, then let's give them as much of a surprise as possible. ——I'm gonna slap their face and make them apologize over and over, and after that, I'm gonna make them find Emilia and the others.[37]"

Determining that, Subaru turned towards the right path and brandished his lantern there, having declared that.

And then, Ram gave a soft sigh, behind Subaru's back,

Ram: "I agree with you, but there's still a chance that Emilia-sama, along with everyone else, will make it to the Watchtower before us."

Subaru: "Honestly, wasn't this a good spot to show off…?"

Subaru, whose spirit was being strained even before the challenge began, voiced out his disgruntlement.

[37] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "No gender pronouns are included when talking about the Sage". I'll add that this goes for pretty much every single mention of the Sage. Gender-specific pronouns are scarcely used in Japanese.

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After those exchanges, the three of them and their ground dragon—— the group of four went into the right path.

He still had a bad feeling, even now. That feeling seemed to make even the sand underneath his feet feel different. Whilst tasting this discomfort, Subaru wiped the cold sweat that trickled down his forehead and grinned at Patrasche.

Subaru: “Come to think of it, I was wrong to decide which way to take without hearing your opinion.”

Patrasche: “————”

Subaru: “Huh? Where you’re going is the road I will take? And whatever road it is, no matter how harsh, you’ll believe in me since I always weather through? Heyhey, you’re way too handsome, I’m falling in love![38]“

Ram: “He is being nonsensical, but he does not seem to be doing it by mistake, so he is being sinful, do you not think so? What good do you see in him?”

Ram muttered that out as if she were shocked upon seeing Subaru rambling on about Patrasche’s feelings as if he was her, whilst she remained taciturn. Though Patrasche would usually immediately rebuff such talk, right now she had remained composed as if he had not said anything wrong.

Or, she had thought it foolish to waste strength doing that, so she was saving it for until they reached a safer place. One of the two. Likely the latter.

Subaru: “Even if so, can you go easy on me, if possible?”

Patrasche: “————”

Subaru: “Was that a voice of denial just now?”

[38] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “When Subaru is pretending to speak for Patrasche he’s using 私 as Patrasche’s personal pronoun whilst using his usual 俺 to refer to himself”.

Despite having chosen silence until now, she abruptly let off an impatient bark of denial at what he had said. But then, having the mettle to escape safely from here first of all before berating him was quite the good thing.

Because that meant Patrasche believed that they could get out of here safely.

Subaru: "————"

They kept on walking without any change, with Subaru at the head, and Patrasche at the back. The lantern's light illuminated the way several meters ahead; making sure to tread carefully, their exploration continued.

Their pace, however, had definitely slowed down compared to their way here. It was even slower than when they had taken the left road before he had Returned by Death.

The reason why was simple.

Subaru: "My body… is so heavy…"

It was not that his weight had increased, or that an invisible Yokai[39] had climbed onto his back. And, in practice, it definitely was not any sort of issue that affected his actual corporeal self.

That both his body was heavy and his feet unmoving was entirely a mental problem.

Sure enough, the right path was brimming with a negative sensation that caused his feet to seize up.

He hoped this was one of the Sage's detestable trials, and that if they came out of the forked road, they would find a safe spot awaiting them ahead—— Of these hopes, he did not hold a single one. But unfortunately, even those hopes were fleeting and quickly turned. Rather, his negative thoughts, which felt like a curse, grew ever stronger.

Subaru: "————"

[39] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "Wikipedia page. Roughly, «spectre», but I wanted to keep it like in the Japanese".

Gulping down some saliva, still keeping his silence, Subaru took a step forward so to move his leaden feet from the sand.

His feet were frozen in place, he would not move. Even if in his heart, Subaru knew just how weak and fragile he was, he should not have felt like cowering in this passageway of sand, where nothing had happened yet.

Indeed, he felt no fear at heart, and even his head felt clear.

Just, his limbs did not try to move in line with that purpose. His flesh and body, only, were acting against his reason and the course of his soul. His body instinctually rejected it, and tried to stop him from moving forward.

It cost Subaru twice as much time, strength and willpower to move forward. And even he could not help but feel tired.

Subaru: “Fool. Can I really whine this much?”

Violently shaking his head, Subaru tried to forget the feeling of tiredness that ladened his body.

Choosing the right path had been no one but Subaru’s decision. Even though it had been, he could not permit himself to try and whine, or such, before the two behind him did.

Subaru: “Well, this walk sure may be a little difficult, but it’s no big deal. Surprisingly, our goal may be getting closer…”

Ram: “Barusu.”

Subaru: “Oh, what’s up?”

Ram: “Shut up.”

Subaru: “Ah, oh…”

His attempt at trying to drive away his whining with a show of bravado was shot down by Ram’s curt toxicity.

Their pace had fallen drastically, and their fear of the surroundings had also only increased. It seemed like probably even Ram was being taxed mentally. That her words were more toxic and curter than usual was proof of that.

Subaru: “Hey, I get what you’re feeling, but I think I suck at walking in silence.”

Ram: “Are you walking to enjoy yourself? Remember why we are doing this.”

Subaru: “Well, no, but like…”

Ram: “Be silent and walk.”

An unapproachable, obstinate attitude.

Of course, though Ram’s opinion was correct, Subaru had a point as well.

Right now, the weight of his body was pulling into sync with the weight on his mind. In other words, it had become a vicious circle where the heavier his mood got, the heavier his body became. He had wanted to take their minds off it a bit so that things would not end up like that.

Keeping on guard was important, as well as wanting to show some consideration, but he wanted them to show that they had understood that and taken it on board. Or rather, Ram especially should take it on board. She always showed consideration.

Still, she might be really struggling.

Subaru: “Do you reckon we should move faster?”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “Ram?”

Subaru called out trying to determine how urgent the conditions had gotten, but Ram did not bother replying to his words at all. The light from the two lanterns, one of which was illuminating the path ahead of Subaru, and the other which was illuminating their surroundings from Patrasche’s neck, did not allow the particulars of Ram’s expression to be seen.

With her hood pulled over her head, Ram cast her eyes down to look at Anastasia's back. Her face was not visible.

Subaru: "Ram?"

Anastasia: "Natsuki-kun, ain't that quite enough?"

Subaru: "Ah?"

Stopping in his tracks, Subaru turned his head around to try and look at her expression. But Ram, stubborn as she was, did not allow him to see her face, and on top of that Anastasia had defended her.

Seeing Subaru's lips bend in frustration, Anastasia scratched her cheek, with a troubled expression adorning her face.

Anastasia: "I hadn't mentioned it but, Ram-san was considerably flustered after wakin' up underground. Her composure seemed to have come back because of how plucky she is, but I guess it still looks like she hasn't fully regained it."

Subaru: "——Tch! You're saying too much…!"

Anastasia: "Look, will ya leave this to me?"

While Anastasia had put some consideration to Ram's feelings, her words lacked in it. Having just had her hidden innermost thoughts divulged, Ram gritting her teeth could be heard all around them, but Anastasia took no notice of it.

She raised one of her small hands and pointed it in front of her so that Subaru could see it.

Anastasia: "We shouldn't talk right now. When yer nerves are frayed to the limit, no matter who says what, nothin' good will come out of it. Ain't that right?"

Subaru: "————"

Anastasia: "Ain't that right?"

Though it annoyed him, Anastasia, or rather, Eridna had a point.

He had put too much priority in trying to move forward and getting out of the cave safely. Subaru this time definitely had not been able to consider Ram's feelings much. The price for doing that had come to bite him back here, and mayhap had ended up expressed in Ram's attitude.

Now that he thought about, it was overly hasty of him to assume that there was a problem there because of Ram.

Subaru: "…You're right. You're definitely right. It was my bad."

Ram: "Reflect on it."

Subaru: "——Tch! Hey, you!"

Anastasia: "Stop that, no fightin'. C'mon, Natsuki-kun, keep movin' forward, keep movin' forward."

Subaru's nerves had become frayed on seeing Ram's attitude, which gave no signs of letting up. However, Anastasia had gotten in between them and somehow stopped him there. She then pointed at Subaru motioning him to move forward.

She nudged the lantern that was fastened around Patrasche's neck with her feet, rocking it about. Seeing the silhouettes of the passageway of sand flickering across his sight, Subaru clicked his tongue.

Although he was unable to stomach her attitude, there would be no point in them falling into strife here.

Fortunately, he could excuse it as the unpleasant atmosphere influencing the highs and lows in their mood. While he could lay the blame on something, there was no need to worsen their relations with such an unnecessary thing. They could talk about their current foul attitudes when they made it safely out from here.

Subaru: "…Let's get going."

Once again, the search spearheaded by Subaru resumed.

However, their pace was still slow, and did not get any faster. In the end, his so-called attempt at picking up their spirits and removing the loads from their body had failed. Since nothing had changed for the better, the chances of the situation improving had naturally become zilch.

Even so, when it came to change, there had been some. And it was not a change with Subaru and the others, but rather a change with the maze of sand itself.

Subaru: “No matter how you look at it, the path has become narrower.”

They had probably spent nearly an hour steadily advancing through the right path.

The pathway of sand was narrowing from the left, right, top and bottom. The height and width of the path was reaching a size that would make it impossible for large Witchbeasts to pass through.

There was just enough space for Patrasche to squeeze through. However, it was at a size where it was not wide enough to accommodate the Dragon Carriage which Gian pulled. Likely, it was impossible for Sand Earthworms and Centaurs to pass through too.

At least, in other words, when it came to the worst situation, i.e., a Centaur lying in wait ahead on the path—— that situation seemed to have been avoided. Compared to that, no matter what laid ahead, at least they seemed to have avoided going towards that terrible direction.

Subaru: “But, it looks like we’ll have to be more cautious since the path’s become narrower. We’ll probably end up unable to move without any warning; you guys will need to be on your guard too.”

Ram: “…Tsk.”

Subaru: “——Oi.”

Subaru, who had said that thinking about what would happen soon, raised one of his eyebrows at the sudden sound. Turning his head back, he looked at the two on dragon-back who were illuminated by their lantern.

No one responded to Subaru’s shout. However, he knew that Anastasia, who was sitting at the front on top of Patrasche, had covered her face with the palm of her hands.

That seemed natural for Anastasia, who wanted, in one way or another, to move forward and keep things rolling along smoothly. Anyway, what Ram had done now was that she had tsk’ed at Subaru’s words.

Subaru: “What have you really been planning from the start?”

Ram: “Nothing.”

Subaru: “It’s not nothing! I asked you what have you been planning!”

Raising his voice at the limit of his patience, Subaru kicked at the wall of sand beside him. Part of the surface of the fragile wall came loose, but Subaru did not care at all about the sand which sprinkled down on him. All that Subaru saw right now was the insolent Ram.

Subaru: “All I can hear is you butting in over and over again when people are walking in silence. It seems like this isn’t the first time you clicked your tongue at me, isn’t that right? Hey, oi, what are you planning!?”

Ram: “Nothing in particular. Ram has nothing at all to say to you, Barusu.”

Subaru: “Nothing at all, and yet aren’t you clicking your tongue at me year after year going tchtchtchtchtchtch? Aren’t you doing that? There’s got to be a reason for you to be saying that you aren’t doing that, even though you are, hasn’t there?!”

Subaru’s fervor continued to grow stronger than before, in contrast to the cold Ram’s attitude.

Naturally. Everything which Ram had shown was cold and one-sided in contrast to the exertions which Subaru had made up until now. Subaru did not know why he was being looked down upon and rebuked.

Subaru: “If there’s something you want to say, then say it! Go and say it since I’ll listen!”

Ram: “——That’s why I have nothing to say.”

Subaru: “LIAR! ARE YOU STUPID? IF YOU FEEL LIKE HIDING STUFF THEN HIDE IT ALL! NOW THAT YOU’VE SLIPPED UP, FLAUNT IT ALL OFF… YOU SAY THERE’S NOTHING? THAT’S A FUCKING IDIOT’S EXPRESSION, HUH, DUMBASS!”

Ram: “————”

Ram’s mood changed at seeing Subaru hurling insults at her, spittle flying from his mouth. Sat behind Anastasia, she leaned her body out and glared at Subaru. He was unsatisfied with where she sat as well. Hiding behind others, looking down at him from above.

Was she planning to rise above them all by borrowing something's strength?

Ram: "It seems like you have really gotten yourself all worked about moving forward, haven't you, Barusu?"

Subaru: "THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED THOUGH, ISN'T IT! WHAT DO YOU THINK WE CAME HERE FOR? WE CAME TO MEET THE SAGE, DIDN'T WE!? ALL THE HARDSHIPS WE FACED FOR THIS, AND ALL THE PROGRESS WE MADE, WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT IT!?"

Ram: "You are wrong—— We have not come here to meet the Sage."

Subaru: "Ahh?"

Ram: "We came here to return Rem back to how she was."

Ram clearly asserted this, all the while glaring at Subaru. Overwhelmed by the sharpness and pressure that emanated from her eyes, Subaru's conviction, previously seething, weakened a little.

"Saving Rem" is equal to "Meeting the Sage", isn't it?

Subaru: "IT'S THE SAME THING, ISN'T IT!? MEET THE SAGE AND THEN SAVE REM! IT'S CONNECTED!"

Ram: "IT'S NOT. SAVING REM COMES FIRST, AND MEETING THE SAGE COMES AFTER THAT. YOU'VE GOT YOUR PRIORITIES WRONG… Yes, you have got them all wrong."

Ram's voice trembled as she spoke the last of those words. The fury she had voiced was a wrath that burnt like an unquenchable raging fire that brought together everything the emotionless girl had felt up until now.

In the underground area of these cold dunes of sand, Ram continued to speak, her words still full to the brim with the fever of wrath.

Ram: "Ram came here for Rem, to remember her little sister. And yet, what are we doing now? Rem is not even here… so stop messing about idly in this place."

Subaru: "No one's messing about…! Because things ended up like this; now that things ended up like this, there's nothing else we can do at this time. Am I wrong?"

Ram: “Yes, maybe so. But, before we make sure of that, Barusu, have you ever worried about Rem even once?”

Subaru: “…Ah?”

Ram: “Ever since you woke up below ground, Barusu, have you ever worried about Rem? Or about Emilia-sama? Or about Beatrice-sama? Have you ever at all worried about those who are missing?”

Ram showered those questions at him, but he kept silent, speaking not a single word in return.

Certainly this time around, unlike the last, Subaru had not tried to check how everyone else was doing, after he had woken up from Returning by Death.

However, this absolutely was not because he was not worried about them, but rather because he knew that Ram and Anastasia did not know anything about them. It was Subaru’s consideration. It was care. And despite that,

Ram: “No, you never did, did you? You never did, Barusu. You do not care at all about Rem, Barusu, because your head is full of Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama. Well, so be it, you are just that kind of man. But, I feel bad for Rem.”

Subaru: “…Shut up.”

Ram: “Didn’t Rem believe in you, Barusu? Ah, though I do not know, since that too is a convenient story which I have only heard from you, Barusu. Maybe you were just saying whatever popped into your head. You only say what is convenient in front of women. I feel bad for Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama as well, deceived by such a man!”

Subaru: “SHUT THE FUCK UP!”

Ram: “No, I will not. How many times must I repeat myself—— Barusu, you do not care about Rem at all. Even if she cannot be found, you would just feel glad.”

Subaru: “——DON’T YOU MESS ABOUT WITH ME!!”

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by Norvak (source)

His field of view was dyed in crimson, and his nerves had flared up hearing her vent those thoughtless remarks. His anger at the arrogant woman, who had vented out those selfish words whilst looking down upon him from her perch, exploded.

He would grab her and drag her down—— Though the time it would take to do that was not quick enough.

Subaru: “INVISIBLE PROVIDENCE——!!”

Ram: “——Kh, AH!?”

Subaru dropped that darkish sensation which swirled through his brain down to his chest, and let it loose.

The black palm which had come into being cried out in joy and smoothly stretched itself out. It crept up to the rear of the ground dragon’s back, where it threw down the pink-haired girl who had denounced him.

Letting off a shriek, Ram wildly tumbled onto the sand.

Confusion racked Ram’s face, indicating she had no idea what had happened after she had been hit by the demonic hand unseen to the naked eye. Subaru rushed over next to where Ram was lying down atop of the sand. And then,

Subaru: “Don’t you mess about with me.”

Saying that he had not thought at all about Rem, saying things like that, was no joke.

Consumed by anger, following his overheated thoughts, everything had gone astray whichever way he looked upon it,

Ram: “——Uu.”

——Subaru leaned down over Ram in supine position, and began to strangle her slender neck.

Creak, creak.

Creak, creak, creak.

Arc 6 Chapter 15 – Scattered to the Sand

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 4 “Faith on the Sands”, Part 4 (starting from 25%)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

Subaru’s fingers wrapped around the slender, white neck.

As Subaru tightened his hold using the entirety of his strength and felt the creaking of neck bones underneath his palms, he felt like something was quite out of place—— like it was a girl’s slender neck.

Ram: “…Ah, uh.”

Ram was being straddled, her neck being strangled by someone with all their might. A groan escaped from her lips.

Her noble features were warped in agony, and drool could be seen dribbling down from the corner of her rosy lips. Her red tongue danced from side-to-side searching for freedom inside of her mouth. She thrashed her arms and legs about, desperately resisting him.

Ram: “————”

Subaru could not possibly put up a fight against Ram were she to put up a serious resistance.

She had managed to beat Garfiel for a bit back at the Sanctuary by herself, and even if she had not, she was a woman that should be well acquainted with the art of self-defense. It would be reasonable to assume that she should possess multiple ways to restrain him and deal with a situation of this ilk, in which she had been seized from above by a man like this.

However, that would boil down to whether she could at least get one of her limbs free or not.

Subaru: “——Invisible Providence.”

Ram: "…Guh."

Subaru set free the dark emotions within his chest as he strangled her neck, a "creak, creak" sounding.

The dark, invisible sediment took shape and helped keep Ram's arms and legs firmly pinned down now. With her limbs pinned down, Ram was unable to struggle about effectively. Her breath would soon stop so long as he continued to put his strength into strangling her neck.

Ram, too, would have regretted her reckless remarks from earlier if she stopped breathing.

Subaru would be able to make her pay with her life for having wounded his heart with her misdirected, callous remarks, and for her ungrounded thoughtless remarks spurned by her selfishness, and for having spoken light of Rem, for thinking he never cared for her.

Subaru: "It's you who's at fault. It's you, you, you!"

Ram was detestable. Ram was detestable. Ram was detestable.

All of those little things that piled up poured out one after the other. He put his hatred into the fingers which were strangling her neck; his nails dug into her pale skin, and blood trickled down.

Ram: "Uhh… Hk."

Ram turned her eyes full of hate at Subaru who was breathing heavily and relishing the touch of hot blood at the end of his fingernails.

What was with that inflexibility in the light pink irises that gazed at him, while the light of her life was about to be snuffed out? It's as if they were complaining, saying, "Ram will not truly die by having her life taken"

He decided that he would gouge out her eyes after he strangled her to death.

Subaru: "Gonna rip you apart piece by piece, bitch… You, when I think of you looking at me with that face, a spitting image of Rem's, it makes me wanna hurl."

Ram: "…"

Subaru: “Ohh? What is it, I can’t hear you? If you got something to say, then say it clearly——”

Ram: “…la.”

Ram wheezed something out that overlapped with the last syllable of Subaru’s abusive tirade. For a split second, Subaru narrowed his eyes to the echo of that sound.

Then the sand beneath Subaru, who was pushing Ram down, exploded and both of their bodies were blown away.

Subaru: “WH…A!?”

Ram: “Gahh…!”

Subaru was showered in sand by the sudden blast which got inside of his mouth and eyes. He toppled down towards the back to the taste of sand and pain. Ram too had been caught up in the explosion, and her small body had taken the brunt of it as she tumbled away from him.

Bearing cuts from the explosion, the blood Ram spilled had spattered across the sand. However, Ram had escaped from Subaru’s clutch. That was the fact of the matter.

Subaru: “Ram! You used fucking magic…!”

Ram: “I had enough time… To take a gasped breath. That is all I need… to be able to, chant… Guh.”

Ram picked herself up from her knees, her breathing was in a feeble state.

She had barely managed to chant out her Wind Magic, Fula, whilst her neck was being strangled. Unable to afford to miss, and unable to aim accurately, she had instead aimed underneath her. As a result, she had dragged both herself and Subaru into the blast and escaped from danger——

Subaru: “Tch——!”

Ram: “————”

As soon as he came to that realization, Subaru turned his hand to the back of his waist and pulled out his whip. At the same time, Ram retrieved a short wand from her bosom, letting her fighting spirit well out showing that she was prepared for battle.

Ram as a magician had the capacity to deliver one strong blow, but even Subaru would not be bested when it came to attack speed. The swift nature of the whip was one that was favored even by the big guns of this world. He should crack his whip straight at her unperturbed looking face so to make it one that he had never have to see again.

Subaru: “Even if you start crying and apologizing, it’s far too late!”

Ram: “That is my line. There is no value in letting an uncaring sex freak like you Barusu meet Rem. Turn to pieces and wither upon the sand.”

Subaru: “Whatever you say!”

Subaru’s resolve in dealing with Ram, who had softly let her murderous intentions flare up, stiffened as well.

Making use of the light of the lantern which had dropped down between them, both Ram and Subaru continued to glare at each other, moving around each other in a circle as they slowly tried to get within striking distance.

And just as the lid was about to be blown off on them slaughtering each other—— Just a few seconds before that happened.

???: “——Aight, that’s enough!”

Subaru & Ram: “——!?”

The sound of violent applause echoed throughout, and both Subaru and Ram’s faces jerked up on hearing its withered timbre. The one who had interrupted them, Anastasia, was looking down on them from dragon-back.

She glared at the two who had been on the verge of trying to kill each other in turn, still sat alone on top of Patrasche.

Anastasia: “That’s enough. I don’t think it’s acceptable that both of ya are glaring at each other with such angry looks on yer faces, despite us all bein’ on the same side. There oughta be limits no matter where we are.”

Subaru: “Limits? AHH, OF COURSE THERE’S LIMITS. AND THE ONE WHO STEPPED OVER THEM AND SAID SOMETHING THAT SHE NEVER SHOULD’VE IS THAT GIRL THERE, ISN’T IT!? THAT’S WHY I’M MAKING HER PAY FOR IT!”

Anastasia: “Ugh, since I ain’t getting’ through to ya, what about’cha, Ram-san?”

Anastasia looked on in shock at Subaru as he jabbed his finger at Ram, and spoke with spittle flying out of his mouth. She had turned her flow of talk towards Ram, but the response she received from the pink-haired girl was not all that different from Subaru’s.

Ram still warily kept the tip of her wand pointed at Subaru, keeping herself on guard for battle.

Ram: “What a foolish question. It is Barusu’s attitude which is intolerable… I am rather at the limits of my patience. If all he cares about is himself, then why do we not go and drop him in the pitch-black darkness alone just like he wants.”

Subaru: “I HAVE NO WORDS FOR THIS BULLSHIT, FUCK OFF!”

Anastasia: “No good from her too, huh? Jeez, why. It seems like I’ve got too much on my shoulders…”

Seeing Ram’s attitude, whose anger remained unrelenting, Subaru’s anger also showed no signs of disappearing.

Anastasia shrugged her shoulders with a gesture that indicated she had given up on the two of them, who continued to exchange sharp looks of murderous intent. Looking at her from the corner of his eye, Subaru began to feel irritated at Anastasia as well.

In the first place, why was Anastasia alone making a face that looked just like she was an outsider?

He wondered who the hell had it been that was behind everything that had happened. He wondered who the hell was it that had first told him to travel to the Augria Sand Dunes and aim for the Sage’s

Watchtower. Who the hell did they think they were, leaving everything to others, despite unmistakably having the strongest incentive for setting out to the Watchtower?

And on top of that, they were sitting alone, even now, looking down from the top of his Patrasche——

Subaru: “HEY, YOU. WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU PREACHING TO ME FROM UP ABOVE. GET DOWN. “

Anastasia: “…Huh, it’s come to that?”

Subaru: “Get on the same level as me before you run your mouth with your arrogance. I’ll hear what you have to say after that. I’m not gonna let you run your mouth at me unless you can do that!”

He swung his whip down, scattering sand up with a woosh.

His whip caused skin to split open if it hit its target; even by looking at it, his whip was a weapon designed to inflict cruel wounds. It probably would not matter if he hurt her host body, that of Anastasia, regardless of whether Eridna was inside of it.

As a matter of fact, Anastasia complied with Subaru’s orders and slowly climbed down from Patrasche’s back. Right after she landed gingerly onto the sand, she cocked her head and asked, “Now what?”.

Anastasia: “There, I got down too, but… Natsuki-kun, what is it that ya wanna do?”

Subaru: “That should be obvious. I’ll let that idiot take back what she said before, and if she doesn’t want to, then there’ll be just one thing left to do.”

If Ram changed her attitude and apologized from the depths of her heart, taking back everything she had said up until now, then Subaru would consider taking into account the extenuating circumstances.

However, Ram’s reaction, who had heard what he had stated, was something that was easy enough to understand.

Anastasia: “Well, that’s what Natsuki-kun’s sayin’, but, what do ya think of it, Ram-san?”

Ram: “That is out of the question. You are leaping to conclusions, for I have nothing that should be taken back. I am having a hard time understanding what in tarnation should be said differently.”

Ram snorted, declaring that with an attitude that looked like she was making a fool out of them from the depths of her heart.

That was her answer. Thus, with that, she had forever lost her chance to be forgiven.

Subaru: “You heard her. Back off. I’m gonna make it so that there’s only one face which is the same as Rem’s in this world.”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “AHH, HEY? You got nothing to say?”

Ram: “I am talking to myself here, but idiocy is a contagious thing when speaking with idiots. That is why nothing shall be said.”

A vein bulged across his forehead, Subaru’s remaining patience got closer and closer to its limit.

In that state, Subaru gathered his strength and tried to get to where Ram was, straight ahead of him, so he could tear her limb-from-limb. Anastasia rushed out spreading out her hands in front of Subaru.

Anastasia: “Whoawhoawhoa! Hey, calm down! You’re jumpin’ to conclusions again.”

Subaru: “Get out of my way! Do you want me to pummel the life out of you first!?”

Anastasia: “Leave it to me. Aight? Hey, Ram-san, just a sec…”

Holding Subaru back, who was trying to step forward, Anastasia turned towards Ram. The taciturn Ram glared at Subaru, before reluctantly moving her gaze slightly towards Anastasia.

However, it did not seem likely that she would change her opinion. In fact, the look in her eyes betrayed that she had no intention to do so. It seemed like she had stepped towards Anastasia just out of obligation.

Anastasia: “Look, Ram-san. I get that ‘cause the air’s bad ‘n such, various feelings end up gettin’ frayed, but…”

Ram: “Such talk does not matter right now, do you not think so? More than that, go say it to that idio——”

Anastasia: "——Aight. It doesn't matter, jeez."

Giving off a fidgety impression, Ram attempted to finalize her conversation with Anastasia as well. For the first time, she had moved her face away from Subaru and looked dead-on at Anastasia.

The reason was because she had felt a sudden impact. An impact which had pierced into her body, more precisely, into the left part of her chest—— the thick knife which Anastasia held in her hand.

Ram: "Ah, guh…?"

Anastasia: "I had to eyeball a decision, which of ya'd be useful. Can ya forgive me?"

She twisted her knife and pulled it out from the wound.

Ram looked down at the fatal wound that had been birthed on the left side of her chest as blood tricked out from the corner of her lips. Then, she looked up at Anastasia, who had raised her hand up with a smile on her face, and collapsed in front of her.

Ram feebly fell down onto the sand. The blood that gushed out of her continued to be soaked up by the parched sand.

Subaru: "H-haa?"

Subaru looked at the scene with his own eyes, at a loss at what had occurred. The palm with which he held his whip trembled and his molars creaked in anger.

Subaru: "WHY DID YOU…!"

Anastasia: "Since ya were goin' about it slowly Natsuki-kun, didn't it seem like ya'd have ended up killin' each other if Ram-san's vigilance couldn't be loosened? What'd I do if both of ya got injured, or both of ya died? I can't escape from this place all alone, ya know?"

Anastasia cocked her head at the angered Subaru, her face showing no ill will.

Her words made logical sense, but what could he, who was crushed by logic, do about this fury of his? His urge that he should have attacked Ram was still uncontrollable, and his rage was still bottled up.

Anastasia: “Or… Are ya feelin’ like takin’ out yer annoyance on me?”

Subaru: “————”

Anastasia: “Don’t’cha think it’s stupid to get seized up by yer current rage, ‘n lose sight of the goal? I think that’s enough of gettin’ rid of companions for the time bein’.”

Anastasia’s words continued to quench his fury as if she was slowly pouring water on them.

It was certainly as she had stated; continuing to get rid of the thinking minds which had come this far was foolish. Moreover, Anastasia, or rather, Eridna was their guide for their journey to the Pleiades Watchtower. It was dubious whether her knowledge had come in handy, but casting her aside would be regrettable.

She was different from Ram. The latter’s words only made him sick to the stomach and had no use to him. Anastasia was a piece that would be bothersome to lose; yes, that was how it was.

Subaru: “…Alright, I’ll get on board with your persuasion for now.”

Anastasia: “Mhm, that’s aight for me. No, thank goodness. What a relief.”

Making a show of patting her chest in relief, Anastasia smiled from ear-to-ear. And then, she stepped through the sand, giving off a perilous impression, and came towards Subaru, proffering her hand out.

Perhaps she wanted them to shake hands?

Anastasia: “A reconciliation; a handshake, to show that from here on out, we’ll be treatin’ each other well, won’t we?”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru faltered for a moment in thought as he looked at the hand she had offered out to him, her face showed no traces of maliciousness.

Anastasia’s true feelings—— Or rather, right now those were Eridna’s true feelings. He did not truly know what she was scheming. He was neither comfortable nor optimistic enough to think that everything she had spoken was the truth.

To start with, Anastasia had killed Ram with the knife that she had kept concealed, whilst she expressed the same smile as she was showing now. Indeed, with a knife that she had kept concealed.

The thick knife she was holding looked like it could cut all the way to the bone depending how it was handled.

Since it had been put in their survival kit along with their lanterns, the kind of utility of an item that was presumed to be for survival was pretty high. However, she had kept it concealed all this time, and had used it in self-defense at a time of need—— No, it may not have been self-defense.

Anastasia: “Natsuki-kun?”

Subaru: “————”

Anastasia: “Y’ain’t takin’ my hand?”

The hand she had offered out, her right one, was empty. However, her left hand was still holding the knife, even now. The range at which he would be able to shake her hand was also the range at which the knife would be able to reach him.

At least one of his hands would be occupied if he took her hand. He didn’t even need to consider which out of his whip and her knife would be more effective at this distance. Taking her hand, wasn’t that in itself a trap?

——Shouldn’t he kill her before he was killed?

Anastasia: “Natsuki-kun?”

Subaru: “Don’t worry, it’s nothing.”

Subaru gave a weak smile and reached out for Anastasia’s right hand. The moment in which she lowered her guard completely would be his chance, after they took each other’s hand.

——Invisible Providence.

He once again invoked the Unseen Hand, and the black magic hand slowly fixed its sights onto Anastasia’s slender neck.

He would not make the same mistake as he had with Ram. Next, he would make the black palm mercilessly crush her throat.

He would teach a lesson to the woman who had kept belittling him ever since she had managed to secure the upper hand with her knife[40]. Although, even if he wanted to show her, this palm would not be visible——

Subaru: "————"

Then, Subaru slowly took her outstretched hand with his own whilst he put the fingers of his black magic hand around Anastasia's neck. The touch of slender fingers; Anastasia's smile's grew deeper. And at the same time, Subaru's lips broke into a sad smile too.

Anastasia: "Well then…"

Right here. Thus, he believed. He would use the strength of his demonic hand before Anastasia could finish speaking and raise her knife. He would grasp her slender neck with his black fingers, and crush her neckbones in an instant——

——Just before that happened however, a blade of wind came streaming in and cleaved Anastasia's body in twain from behind.

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He felt like he had hallucinated that a wind had blown, straight after that.

A spray of red gushed out right in front of his eyes, a daft voice let out an "Eh?", and Anastasia's body was bisected across the middle.

A large volume of blood was strewn out onto the white sand. Steaming shit and warm guts mingled in with the cold air, leaving behind a putrid smell to hang over the inside of the cave.

[40] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "I lost a bit of the nuance in translating «目にものを見せてやる» as «to teach a lesson». Literally it reads "To show it to her eyes" which is why the part after that paragraph references «wanting to show her», more or less".

Pink small and large intestines, along with many other internal organs that still showed faint traces of activity rolled onto the sand. The sand itself had turned into a showcase of organs, in which the items on display were the raw ingredients that made up a young girl.

Subaru: "——Ah?"

Witnessing the spectacle in front of him, Subaru cast his gaze down to his own hand. What he saw there was Anastasia's upper body swinging about; she was still firmly grasping Subaru's right hand with hers. She opened her eyes and speechlessly looked up at Subaru.

Behind her, the lower part of her body which had been cut at the waist, was flopping about. Her legs were convulsing like a marionette, and urine was pouring out everywhere as her muscles had relaxed.

Subaru: "A-AHHHHHHHHHH——!?"

Subaru let out a scream at Anastasia's horrific condition.

He immediately attempted to shake her arm away, however she was holding on with inordinate strength. Unable to shake her off, Subaru just swung the now-half-in-weight Anastasia about. More blood spewed out of her as she was swung about, and the intestine that still connected the upper half of her body with her lower jolted about, scattering body fluids everywhere and emitting a foul odor.

Subaru: "Hah, LET GO! LET GOOOOOOO!"

Anastasia: "NOOOOO! I DON'T WANNA DIE…![41]"

Subaru: "YOU'RE ALREADY DEAD! CAN'T YOU GRASP THAT YOU'RE BEYOND SAVING!?"

Her vivid laments were far clearer than imagined, leading Subaru to scream in return.

[41] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "Anastasia, or rather, Eridna, has been using «うち» exclusively as her personal pronoun. However, here, she emphasized it by saying «ウチ». In a Q&A, someone asked if the possession was undone, and Tappei answers cryptically with «If you try paying attention to the way she refers to herself, perhaps the riddle will be solved». In fact, Eridna cannot pronounce «ウチ» properly, and always uses «うち», so this implies that in this moment, this could be Anastasia."

The upper and lower half of her body had now separated and so much blood and guts had flooded out. It was wrong for her not to have died immediately. It was also wrong for her to still keep grasping his hand. It was all so ridiculous.

Subaru: “LETGO LETGO LETGO LETGO LETGO——”

Anastasia: “NO, NOOO! I WON’T, I ABSOLUTELY WOOON’T… Hk.”

Subaru: “EVEN IF YOU SAY THAT NOW, I CAN’T DO ANYTH… GAH!?”

The upper half of Anastasia clung to his arm, and pain shot through Subaru’s shoulder as he tried to throw her off. Anastasia was still holding the knife in her left hand, and had thrust it into Subaru’s body in an attempt to hold on to him.

The sharp blade easily pierced through Subaru’s left shoulder, and cracked his collarbone beneath it. Bleeding and scorching pain caused Subaru to scream.

Subaru: “GAHHHHHHHHHH——!? FUCKING IDIOT, HURRY UP AND DIEEE!!”

Anastasia: “NOOOO… Hk.”

Subaru fiercely grabbed Anastasia by the face and forcefully tore off her body. With great difficulty, he had finally grasped the girl shouting something out whilst in tears, and thrown her away.

Anastasia’s body had been quite petite to begin with. And now that she had become half, and with all the blood she had lost, she felt as light as a feather.

Subaru: “Haaa, haaa, haaaaaaa…!”

Without taking any notice of that, Subaru put his hand on his wounded right shoulder[42]. His sight flickered in pain, and his heartbeat accelerated like it was going to explode. However, it was no life-threatening wound.

[42] A minor oopsie from Tappei, some paragraphs above he says Subaru’s left shoulder (左肩) was stabbed, now here he uses right shoulder (右肩). Well, what is it? Considering later descriptions, it should have been the right shoulder all along.

Subaru sluggishly reached into his thoughts whilst besieged by an unchanged sickening tension.

The blow that had killed Anastasia just now was that of——

???: "——Barusu."

Subaru: "Guh, ah."

A shadow swayed up in front of Subaru, who had fallen onto his backside and was gasping in pain.

A slender girl with blood covering half of her body came into view from the dim light of the lantern half-buried in sand—— Ram.

Since she had been stabbed in the chest by Anastasia's knife, he had taken her for dead. Yet, the girl still breathed. And keeping ahold of her tenacity, she had murdered Anastasia with her magic.

Subaru: "…This fucking idiot. If you're gonna die, then fucking die on your own."

Subaru declared that with annoyance in his voice as he looked up at the staggering Ram.

It was not as if Ram was not covered in wounds. Anastasia's attack had been fatal for sure. The bleeding from the wound in her chest had yet to stop, and even now, blood was endlessly soiling her skirt all the way down to its hem. It looked like she would soon die due to blood loss.

However, before that happened, she could take Subaru with her.

Subaru: "Sh… it…"

Subaru looked around his surroundings, trying to find his *arme de guerre*, his whip. However, even if he located it, his right arm which he used to wield it was injured from the shoulder. He could not wield it with his left arm like he did with his right.

Then, he had just one choice left.

Subaru: "INVISIBLE PROVIDEN…!?"

His trump card, which he had already relied on many times in this short period of time. Once again, Subaru's brain throbbed in burning pain the moment he tried to unleash the strength of his invisible black palm. An agony like his skull was being bored through by a drill exploded within him.

Subaru: "Gah! Ahh!? Guh, ugh!?"

Puke trickled out from the corner of Subaru's mouth due to the agony that visited him in waves.

In exchange for attempting to use his trump card past its limits, his consciousness was broken up by the hellish banquet that had woken up inside his skull, starting from his cranial nerves. The pain of his right shoulder and such was not even comparable to this.

Whittling at his brain and skull, the sense of loss froze Subaru's will like it was gnawing at his soul.

Speaking nothing of the resistance he offered with his crappy whip, Subaru, who was writhing in agony, was prime prey. The dying Ram moved her body fueled only by hatred, and slowly made her way towards Subaru, raising her bloodstained wand.

Ram: "Fuuu——"

Subaru: "Ahhhhh! Gahhhh! OHHHH, AHHHHHHH!?"

Subaru rolled over to where Anastasia lay in her pool of blood, still holding his head.

Looking down at him, Ram's lips stirred, and she began to chant her spell. And then——

Ram: "La——"

Subaru: "————"

She completed her chant, and the blade of wind which she created hewed Subaru down. But before that came to be, the sound of something hard being chewed echoed out across the cold cave of sand.

That horrible grating sound continued, and it changed into the sound of flesh and water being chewed.

Subaru: "Ah… Ah."

That he would die, that he would be cut down; Subaru had been convinced of that.

However, the Death that should have come to him didn't come at all. Finally, Subaru's headache and feeling of loss, having been breathing heavily and rolling around, slowly started to subside.

Subaru: "AH, haa, ah, ah?"

He covered his face with his left hand and briskly shook his head which was drenched in cold sweat. Though a dull ache remained, the sharp blade-like agony had faded. Taking deep breaths, he lifted himself up using the strength of his entire soul.

Subaru wiped his moistened cheeks whilst he foolishly took the time to raise only his upper body.

He noticed that his palm was covered in bright red, the source of which came from his own eyes—— it seemed like he had shed tears of blood.

A lot of blood dripped from his nose as well, so the lower half of his face was probably in a horrific state. There was likely no doubt that the drilling pain which pierced directly to his brain was in recompense for his Unseen Hand.

It was something he was acquainted with. The feedback from having used his special superpower had come.

Subaru: "What happ…"

Briskly wiping his face with his sleeve, Subaru looked around his surroundings. He had no idea how much time he had spent in agony. Nevertheless, he had hardly even thought it possible that he had it in himself to spend his time like that.

Something had happened, and with that he had been——

Subaru: "Patrasche?"

Patrasche: "————"

Subaru's jet-black ground dragon nestled up beside him as he sat in blank amazement. Crouched down on the sand, she had heard Subaru's call and shook her long tail, indicating that she was in good health.

Subaru: "So you were uninjured? Hmm, let me think…"

Just now, he recalled what had happened before. He recalled the scene in which Anastasia had been cut in two by Ram, and the latter aiming down at him. Subaru should have been ripped to shreds by Ram's doing.

Subaru: "And yet, why… Did Ram…?"

Perhaps she had used up all her strength and collapsed?

Though it was a really convenient development, Ram had been bearing fatal wounds. It would not be farfetched to think that she had collapsed.

Subaru: "Is that lucky, or unlucky…"

He did not want to say that he was lucky since she had been no less than almost dead. However, if he thought about it, he still could not say he was unlucky since he would have been dead had things gone south.

In any case, now was not the time to go on about these things. Given that everyone who had gotten in his way was gone, he had to get out of this place as soon as he could and make his way to the Watchtower.

Subaru: "Patrasche… Sorry, let me hop on."

Patrasche: "————"

Subaru: "Patrasche?"

Subaru called out to her and touched her back, but the ground dragon did not obey his instructions.

On the contrary, Patrasche, who had crouched down, still did not make any move to show her face to him. She was sitting next to him on the sand, looking rather at peace, merely breathing heavily over and over.

Subaru: "Hey, Patrasche. Are you listening? HEY."

His irritation slowly started to increase. It was a spiral of negative emotions which built up at supersonic speed, similar to those which he had felt against Ram and Anastasia.

He felt like he wanted to teach the unresponsive ground dragon her place.

Subaru: “HEY, PATRASCHE, YOU, LOOK OVER HERE! HEY! “

Patrasche: “————”

Subaru: “BASTARD, LISTEN TO WHAT I’VE BEEN SAYING FROM THE START…”

Patrasche lifted her head up at Subaru, who had raised his voice and furiously slapped her back. He realized that she was trying to come face-to-face with him to try and express her words, breathing heavily out of her nose.

Patrasche’s mouth looked far from normal and was dyed in red.

Subaru: “————”

That crimson color was one that he had become used to seeing already in this short period of time.

That color coated parts of Subaru’s body as well, and still streamed down from his right shoulder even now. The foul smell which drifted around the area lay thick in it, along with that of piss and shit, there was no mistaking it.

However, he had not wanted to notice something. He should not have noticed it.

Subaru: “————”

Pink hair innumerably entwined itself between the fangs that lined Patrasche’s mouth, who had now turned his way.

Subaru: “Eep.”

On the other side of the crouched Patrasche’s large body, Ram, whom he had lost sight of, had fallen down to the ground.

Though the body of the girl had collapsed, he could not tell whether she was lying face up or face down. Checking that would be easy to tell if he looked at her head, but it was precisely because of that which he could not.

He could not assess that because everything above her neck had been chewed on, and its original shape was lost. Ram's skull had been crushed by vicious fangs and her brain juice had spilled out leaving her dead. Just like Anastasia who had had her guts spilled out before dying, Ram had had the contents of her skull spilled out.

And, the one who had performed said deed, Patrasche, was staring intently at Subaru now. Her yellow eyes which resembled that of a reptile, were sharply and cruelly tinged with madness.

Subaru: "——Sto!"

The last thing he saw, was her maw opening up millimeters from his eyes.

All that Natsuki Subaru heard was the sound of his own body being chewed up all the way, until just before he slipped out of consciousness. Even after his head was crushed and his ears stopped working, the sound continued.

He almost ended up laughing, wondering where he was hearing the sound from. However, he had no mouth to laugh with, no life that he could merely laugh at, and nothing which he could laugh at.

He was chewed up by his companion, and died[43].

[43] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "Though it has not been translated, Tappei left a note after the chapter warning readers that the chapter may depict intense imagery. He recommended that readers that tended to lose themselves to their own power of imagination should skim over the chapter. Then he said, «I went ahead and wrote it in the afterword», referring to that warning. So I believe he was being sarcastic/witty there. Because readers would already have read the chapter to get there."

Arc 6 Chapter 16 – Chewed Remains

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 4 “Faith on the Sands”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Mahubrobin — Complete

——The sound of something breaking, only the consciousness continued to hear endlessly.

Bones were being chewed, gray matter being flattened, eyeballs cracking, the liquid therein contained overflowing.

The cranium, the bones of the head were being crushed. The important part on the inside was thoroughly overwhelmed by the pressure of sharp fangs, and it was clear that it was all turning into a pulpy mess.

Gray matter and spinal fluid flowed out together, mingling with an unknown yellow liquid pooling on the forehead, where blood vessels with the appearance of a thin mesh were torn apart, causing red blood to gush forth.

With all of that joining together, consciousness and memory transformed into flesh-colored vomit.

Pain, there was pain. Trouble breathing, too.

The pain in his head creaked like it was splitting his cranium apart—— and thinking so, his consciousness bitterly smiled.

That splitting was not what this was all about.

There was nothing left to split, and everything important was already smashed. Besides, even with the part that registered pain having been squashed, so what was left to say, even?

The organ that accumulated memories and was used for thinking, the brain, had been destroyed; the parts necessary for maintaining life in the first place, had been completely ravaged. What would occur after that happened?

Once such a thing took place, humans would experience Death. So, naturally, him too——

???: "——rusu. Barusu. Get yourself together."

Grabbed by the scruff of its neck, the intensely muddled consciousness was forcefully brought into light.

The first thing he felt upon returning was someone's voice close to his ears, scolding him with a stern face. The voice was not only accompanied by the trembling of sound, but also by a slight feeling on his face as if it had been slapped.

???: "Barusu, if you do not get up, I will burn off your eyelids."

Subaru: "——Hk."

With his sleeping mind hearing that terrifying statement, his consciousness rapidly rose to the surface.

As the voice called and dragged it out of that dark world, his consciousness passed through a suffocating environment that appeared like the surface of water. And so, opening his eyelids before they were scorched by flame,

???: "——Barusu, are you awake?"

Subaru: "————"

Immediately he encountered Ram's face in front of him, her light-crimson eyes narrowed.

He could hear her breathing, unless they looked at one another from close-range if he raised his mouth a bit. Of course, such colorful situation could not exist. The reason Ram was leaning down so close was because the surroundings were so dark that they could not see each other's faces unless they took a look from up close; that was all there was to it.

Upon becoming aware of Ram in front of him, his sense of touch began registering the feeling under his buttocks immediately, among others. Fine particles of sand rolled out from atop his body. Subaru had been lying spread-eagled on the sand sea.

With a breath, air leaked out of Subaru's mouth, and Ram seemed to stare deep into his eyes for a short moment, and then slowly with the other hand she shined a lantern upon his body. From the girl's hand, an orange light cut through the darkness, and Subaru understood that he was still trapped in the labyrinth of sand—— No, he understood he had Returned by Death.

Subaru: "I'm…"

Looking around the darkness, Subaru gradually remembered what happened.

The shock at the moment of death was always vivid, and there was nothing to indicate he had gotten used to shaking off the memories at all. Immersed in the trembling field of his memories, he struggled to remember the meaning of his certain death, and Subaru's last moments grazed past his fingertips as he remembered it.

Subaru: "————"

Recollecting the awful situation, the image of Ram's expression of hatred illuminated by the lantern appeared yet again in his mind with a tremendous impact.

And then, the murder spree that had originated from the insults and abuse he had hurled at her, a killing rampage with no meaning nor significance, and the horrendous conclusion of it all.

Subaru: "Ubu… Hk."

Ram: "Barusu?"

As Ram displayed a confused expression, Subaru involuntarily put his hand over his mouth.

Remembering the reality of Ram's death that had occurred just a couple of minutes ago, and the desire to scream—— was not it. In fact, facing Ram and remembering her gruesome last moments, caused a vomiting urge.

Subaru: "Ugh, eh… Geh."

Subaru's deaths had already exceeded the number that could be counted by the fingers on both hands.

And in this world with Return by Death, it could be said that the experience of losing a close friend like Emilia or Beatrice was nearly the same as his own death.

However, Subaru himself had never got used to death. For his own, or the death of someone else, was one and the same. The fear of being dead himself, or thinking that someone close to him might die, shredded his heart.

——Indeed, in the last loop, the tragedy of Ram's brutal death was a shock he had experienced for the first time.

He had seen her figure having had its stomach cut open, its neck severed, her whole body mercilessly wounded, and then dead.

Each death was full of anguish and grief, and Subaru was unable of putting people's deaths on a scale and compare them. It did not feel right.

However, it was the first time he had had his head crushed, chewed up and ruined in that manner.

He had also witnessed Ram's beautiful face being crushed by fangs without mercy.

That was also a tragedy enacted by Patrasche, one of the beings Subaru most trusted.

Subaru: "…Oh, geh. Geh, gah."

Desperately attempting not to remember it was no different from remembering.

The more he tried to forget Ram's miserable end, the clearer the pink hair and the remnants of her head in the mouth of the ground dragon were carved into Subaru's head.

As a result, it was not possible to get over the urge to vomit, so Subaru turned toward the sand.

However, his throat and stomach had yet to recover from the impact of having Returned by Death, and so they just cramped, not obeying Subaru's will.

Subaru: "Geh, eh…"

Ram: "…Is this just because you woke up suddenly? Miserable."

Tackling the ground, he desperately attempted to vomit the contents of his stomach, but nothing exited. That his throat was dry and that not even a drop of saliva had come out was vexing.

He could not gaze at Ram's expression looking at him with a lantern in one hand, but the surprised tone in her voice was easily conveyed to the panting Subaru.

Naturally, the coldness reminded him of the events just before that death.

The violent passion that led to the murderous intent was rising for no reason, as did the abuse that had triggered the emotional outburst—— the impulse that had driven him to do so urged inside his chest, it was dreadful. However,

Ram: "——Do not bite down."

Subaru: "——Hk."

With that sentence of preamble, Ram sat down beside Subaru and lifted his chin.

The kneeling Subaru was surprised for a moment, and Ram opened Subaru's mouth with no worry as to his reaction, with the same uninterested look as always—— then thrust her own white fingers into the back of Subaru's throat.

Subaru: "…!? Oh, ehk."

Ram: "That Barusu is this severely inept was already known, but this is at the level of a baby."

Having someone else's fingers entering his throat, Subaru felt like his esophagus was being rudely violated.

But then, his stomach and throat, which had resisted vomiting until then, accepted that surprise. This time, both began pushing out gastric juice and saliva at once in a desperate action.

With tearful eyes, Subaru got rid of his urge to retch by letting out his stomach's content on the sand. Only gastric juice and drool had been vomited, but it was still much better than it had been before.

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by Norvak (source)

Subaru: “Eh, geh… Haa, buh… Sorry, I’m fine… Hk.”

Ram: “So? I’m happy that you’re pleased.”

Subaru: “You…”

Subaru wiping his mouth with a sleeve, Ram shrugged her shoulders and replied with childish language[44].

Despite her attitude, it was true that he had made an impression that was roughly at the level of a baby. There was no room to refuse that, and Ram’s palm was still gently stroking Subaru’s back.

It was hard to understand, her scathing thoughtfulness.

Subaru: “The hand, it’s all right. More than that, this place…”

Ram: “You remember that the barrier got broken and the sandy sea cracked in front of us? The dragon carriage was swallowed up, and as a result we got thrown in here.”

Ignoring Ram’s consideration, Subaru spoke while looking at his surroundings. In response to her remark, Subaru was hesitant as to whether he should be relieved or anxious that the Return by Death point had remained the same.

However, in either case, action must be taken quickly.

According to that judgment, he tried to continue speaking——

Ram: “Ever since you woke up below ground, Barusu, have you ever worried about Rem? Or about Emilia-sama? Or about Beatrice-sama? Have you ever at all worried about those who are missing?”

Subaru: “——Uh.”

What resuscitated in his mind were those bladelike words of Rem, both terribly sharp and heart-rending.

The discord that had invited the previous end—— the situation where allies killed one another, was obviously abnormal.

[44] A bit difficult to replicate this in English, but hopefully contractions and simple language work here.

He must come back to his senses, but recalling the situation, it was hard to imagine that he had been in a normal state of mind. In the first place, the trigger was abnormal. It was absurd that something such as negative emotions had been amplified and evolved into the exchange of insults and then into mortal combat.

Ram: “Barusu?”

Ram tilted her head at Subaru’s visage, as his words would not come out.

The last time they had talked, discord sowed by an aberrant situation had followed suit. So of course, there was no meaning in being concerned about the words Ram had spoken in such a state—— But it was inaccurate to say that everything that had been said was a lie.

The fact was that the dissatisfaction and indignation Subaru had felt towards Ram had not been fake, but true. Even though they had been augmented to a point that they would not have in normal circumstances. But it was not that everything had been untruthful.

Then, it was also true that Ram had held some inexpressible discomfort over the fact that Subaru’s attitude seemed like he had no concern regarding about Emilia and the others. If consideration were given to that feeling, Subaru should be worried about Emilia here in any shape.

Actually, he was worried, so it was not a lie to act that way.

However, he just knew that he could not do anything about the target of his worry.

Subaru: “————”

At this time, yes, at this time, did Subaru realize that he was at a loss for words for that.

He knew it was necessary to avoid conflict, but still hesitated to deceive Ram by lying. Worrying about his peers and deceiving others by being calculative—— disgusting, it was.

Naturally, that hesitation had to be swallowed down. It was not worth getting someone displeased for that reason.

Subaru: “That… everyone…”

Ram: "——It is useless to blame yourself so much. There is no point in pursuing who is responsible. There should be something else to give priority to, rather than wasting time like that."

However, before Subaru could speak his words of worry, Ram reached her own conclusion on Subaru's feelings. That being said, she had misread the serious expression in Subaru's face.

That was something rare, for Ram's insight. She would sometimes say and do things as if she could see through people's hearts; her error here was evidence that she was impatient deep down inside.

Ram: "Besides, we have already wasted time with Barusu's vomiting."

Of course, Ram would never display such stormy behavior of her own heart.

Because of Ram's attitude, which could not be described as headstrong but rather as a bluff, Subaru was at a loss for words. After that, Ram moved first without saying anything.

While she wiped the finger which had been jabbed into Subaru's mouth, she turned the lantern towards the back of the labyrinth.

Ram: "We cannot stay here, Ram must be with Rem and… we have to join up with Emilia-sama and the others."

Subaru: "I know… Who else is here?"

Ram: "Besides Ram and Barusu… it seems like they have just returned."

With Ram glossing over that confirmation, she turned back, and he followed her words and gaze.

Coming from the other side of the maze with a swaying flickering light, were Anastasia and Patrasche. Subaru's eyes shook slightly, as he gazed at the jet-black dragon that melted into the dark.

That dignified and ferocious beautiful face, illuminated by the flickering orange light.

A row of fangs that could be mistaken for blades were present within that closed mouth, which had crushed the girl's head, which had even crushed Subaru himself all of a sudden——

That would not occur in normal circumstances.

Subaru: “Am I an idiot…? No, I am definitely an idiot.”

Clenching his teeth, Subaru tried to stifle his fear.

In that abnormal friction, the murderous intention that had been directed could not be genuine. The experience of being killed by Patrasche was carved into Subaru’s heart, as a scar that could not be healed.

Still, Subaru had supposedly been faced with existences that had murdered him time and time again.

Subaru: “Yeah, even Rem and Ram, at first …”

Even Ram, who had just now displayed her affection.

Even Rem, who had supported and forgiven Subaru with her devotion.

His relationships with them had been the worst at first, there had been times his life had been targeted, there had been times he had been deprived of it.

Compared to that, the events from just before, which had not been intentional, were adorable.

Subaru: “That’s right. That’s very right… It has to be, right?”

He embraced his shoulders and grabbed his skin as if feeling cold.

In the basement of the sand sea, in this place dominated by sand and darkness, it was certainly cold. However, the reason as to why he felt those chills was different from the ambient air.

Anastasia: “——Natsuki-kun, ya seem to have woken up.”

Ram: “——With some assistance. So, how is the vicinity?”

In front, Ram and Anastasia were talking.

They should be fine-tuning a strategy for conquering this labyrinth of sand based on the information they had just obtained. Originally, Subaru had blended in there, with many things he had to communicate.

But now, the priority was to calm his mind and to stop the quaking of his knees.

With Return by Death, the events and impacts immediately before death should have been left behind. But even if he tried to quench it, the fear emerged, and the passion of that moment revived.

Subaru kept resisting, endlessly so, as to disperse those feelings.

Subaru: "————"

With Subaru in such a state, the jet-black ground dragon seemed lonely as it watched him attentively.

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——The heart of Subaru, who had supposedly Returned by Death just now, had yet to be restored wholly.

Apart from that particular aspect, the four-person exploration of the sand maze proceeded in almost identical fashion as before.

In search of their allies, the group headed by Subaru slowly moved in the cold darkness. With the lantern lighting up the corridor, the journey was slow and frustrating, keeping an eye for any shadows lying along the road.

Subaru: "————"

Truth be told, Subaru wished to skip this checking process.

Subaru had gone through this way twice already. There was no way Emilia and the rest were strolling in the area that he could see. However, there was no point in appealing to the two people behind him. There was no defense to the argument that it was something that had been overlooked.

As a result, the frustrating march did not pick up its pace, Subaru's impatience only rose as time went by.

Anastasia: "Everyone else's prolly okay… In our case, we're just barely in luck to have Patrasche-chan here."

Subaru & Ram: "————"

Anastasia: “If ya think ‘bout it, it’d be hell to have no ride in the sand sea. As expected, the only thing to be worried ‘bout’s the lack of strength…”

Subaru & Ram: “————”

Anastasia: “If push comes to shove, I won’t hesitate to use my trump card, but if I don’t use it sparingly, I’m afraid we’ll end up havin’ our backs to the wall. So can I rely on the two of ya?”

Subaru & Ram: “————”

Anastasia: “…Hey, are ya listenin’ to me, Natsuki-kun, Ram-san? For a while now I’ve been talkin’ to ya all by myself.”

As their search journey resumed, Anastasia chatted continuously, but she seemed to have become cross with them. Subaru stopped and looked back at her, who had complained about getting the silent treatment.

Then brightening Anastasia’s face with the lamp, he took a deep breath, and spoke,

Subaru: “How can you go on and on without running out of things to say…? For now, we’re sort of desperate to find everyone else. We don’t have time to chatter uselessly.”

Anastasia: “There’s no waste nor anythin’. I’m talkin’ ‘bout things related to our future plans. ‘Sides, it’s usually Natsuki-kun’s role to continue chattin’. Without that, the two girls… No, us four’s anxieties’ll be goin’ up.”

Subaru: “Four, huh?”

As Subaru pouted his lips, Anastasia’s mouth went on and on.

The “two girls” here referred to Ram and Anastasia, but with it being rephrased to “four people”, it would result in adding Eridna and Patrasche. Strictly because Anastasia was Eridna, that should be rephrased as “three people”—— but it was not something to correct in the first place.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru thought, narrowing his black eyes at Anastasia, who was puffing her cheeks.

The real Anastasia was dormant, and now, Eridna was donning her appearance. Even so, her behavior had become so familiar, it seemed as if she had blended in.

It was unfortunate that, independently of which one of them was in control, it was still impossible to see through her facial expressions, words, and behavior to see her true intentions.

——In the disagreement that had culminated in them killing each other last time around, though he was conscious about Ram and Patrasche because of how horrifying that ending had been, Anastasia's attitude also brought forth a sense of discomfort.

Ram's enmity and Patrasche's attack were easy to understand; the two had apparently gone crazy.

However, at first sight, it was hard to judge whether Anastasia had fallen into insanity, and whether what had laid within her heart had been indiscernible until the very end.

Of course, due to their difference in strength, Anastasia had been slain by Ram, but her cunning was dangerous. She had concealed a knife in an emergency bag, and had looked for a weak spot by feigning mediation. If he were not wary, he could be caught and murdered in his sleep at any time.

Subaru: "…Whatever it takes."

——He wondered, had they always been hostile to him?

Subaru: "——Kuh."

Facing the passage ahead, Subaru punched his cheek in a way so that Ram and Anastasia would be unable to see it.

His mouth was cut with that unrestrained blow, and he felt a sharp pain as the tip of his tongue became acquainted with the taste of blood. He would hurt himself to correct the cloudiness of his consciousness.

Ram and Anastasia, they were not acting abnormally.

It was Subaru, who was not able to let go of the abnormality now.

Subaru: "Great, understanding that I'm being weird all by myself, I'm shuddering."

Had he gone insane, or was everyone else insane?

There had been a time when Subaru had become so conceited as to believe that everything except him was wrong.

Ultimately, of course, it had all been a mistake. Subaru himself, a lost cause as he was, had tasted the foolish experience of arrogantly assuming that he was in the right, and in the process, he denied all that surrounded him.

He had known all along that he had been in the wrong, and in the end, he was able to indicate that and admit it. It was an accurate, vivid memory.

However, the current Subaru acknowledged his own abnormality in normalcy. On top of that, it was terrible that he was not managing to tame his abnormality. Just awful.

At this point, Subaru remembered.

This desolate sensation in his heart, where the loneliness would drive one into craving madness.

This was the horizon that the madman, Petelgeuse Romanée-Conti, had reached. Being aware of his own madness, recognizing his abnormality with normalcy, this was what that madman had gazed upon.

Ram: “Barusu, what’s wrong?”

While he was feeling disgusting empathy, Ram’s voice fell upon the trembling Subaru’s back. Subaru swallowed the blood mixed with saliva and looked back at those two, acting like nothing happened.

Subaru: “Nothing, just sand in my shoes making me feel uncomfortable.”

Ram: “…Ram’s heart doesn’t care even a bit about you in particular being silent, Barusu, but Anastasia-sama’s words do also have a point.”

Subaru: “What do you mean?”

Ram: “Even if you are the one shutting up, holding back something will not ease a woman’s anxiety. If you wish to do so, then hide it better.”

Subaru: “————”

To those words, Subaru once again bent his lips.

The meaning of Ram’s words was obvious, difficult to be mistaken about. Then he also noticed that Ram’s words were translations of Anastasia’s hard-to-understand words.

It seemed as if he was being seen through, and his heart rather began to scatter.

Subaru: “It’s vague, I don’t think I can explain by saying it.”

Ram: “It is too late for incomprehensible statements like those from you, isn’t it, Barusu? If there is a matter of concern, it is normal that arrangements are made regarding it.”

Anastasia: “Ram-san’s really an unforgivin’ opponent for Natsuki-kun.”

Tutting at Subaru’s words, Ram’s usual sharp tongue struck back. With bitterness and sharpness close to being poisonous, Anastasia gave a bitter smile.

To Anastasia’s calm composure, Ram shrugged her shoulders,

Ram: “Please be relieved, Barusu is pretty happy, because he is a deviant who enjoys suffering.”

Subaru: “The fuck are you talking about? Why on earth are you judging on what I am? Don’t turn me into a punching bag so freely, okay? You know what? You can only hit someone if you’re prepared to be hit yourself, yeah?”

Ram: “Hmph.”

Snorting her nose, Ram’s attitude was almost that of her usual self.

Unlike Subaru’s mood, that she had already been able to return to her self-indulgent self was envious and hateful. He felt disgusted just for thinking so.

However, even though they were having the usual chit-chats, the shade of the shadows of discord would be dimmed like this. During his daily life with those girls, that had undoubtedly been the light that Subaru had created.

Subaru: “If I somehow explain something that’s difficult to explain… I’m just a little paranoid now.”

Ram & Anastasia: “————”

After putting into words, it sounded more futile than he had imagined. It was no wonder that Ram and Anastasia both had bent their lips in response to that.

Patrasche: “————”

Looking at her, even Patrasche seemed to be somewhat taken aback.

For Patrasche, who was clever and able to discern the reason behind things, it was possible that she regarded Subaru as good-for-nothing now. Rather, if she gave up on Subaru and replaced him with a proper owner, it would be way better for her.

Actually, he felt like even Ram and Anastasia were better at handling Patrasche. If she believed him to be a hindrance, it was only natural that she would open her fangs wide towards Subaru——

Subaru: “*Yamero*, *yamero*[45]…”

Anastasia: “I understand it’s more serious than first thought, given how stupid it sounds.”

Anastasia commented on Subaru’s self-deprecation as he stared at Patrasche. Upon their realization that the reason was ridiculous, relief and anxiety simultaneously increased.

In other words, one of their options was to eliminate Subaru. Before that happened, still——

Subaru: “I, really am a pain in the ass.”

Anastasia: “Perhaps it’d be easier if we tied him up and carried him for real, no?”

His face turning red then pale as his face controted into several different expressions on its own, Anastasia threw in the towel regarding Subaru. Ram curled her eyebrow at Anastasia’s observation, thinking out loud, “However”,

[45] Engrish flip. Means “stop/cease” (やめろ), originally “ストップ” (stop).

Ram: “Even if we do tie up Barusu’s hands and legs, it would not solve the situation at its core.”

Subaru: “Don’t use such strong words. You might make an enemy out of me.”

Ram: “It is not that much of a big threat, but Ram does not wish to turn herself into an enemy of Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama… I would not be able to face Rem again.”

As Ram was ruminating, Subaru struggled not to harbor any hostility towards her. While fighting such emotions, there was in fact something he was wondering about.

In reality, there was nothing to think about in this situation.

However, now that they had embarked on a journey to reach Pleiades Watchtower, having Returned by Death twice now in that maze of sand, a question had to be asked.

——When it came to the matter of Rem, Ram reacted awfully sensitively.

Subaru: “————”

Of course, for Subaru, it was a good sign that Ram cared about Rem.

For Rem, who had been erased from everyone’s memory other than Subaru, only Subaru held a two-way bond with her. Although, it certainly caused a special feeling in Subaru, but it had no meaning in a practical sense.

As for Rem’s circumstances of isolation, Ram was trying to get closer to her family as much as possible.

Of course, no memory of Rem remained in her. That sad fact, he had come to learn over the past year. On the other hand, however, there was no doubt that Ram accepted the existence of another girl like herself, Rem, more seriously than “the truth Subaru had informed her of”.

And apparently those feelings were so much “beyond Subaru’s imagination”, that perhaps the actual feelings were being brought back to Ram.

That could be seen from the explosion of discontent in the previous loop within the labyrinth—— which had triggered the outburst for Subaru’s lack of consideration.

She did not remember. Yet, Ram's feelings were comparable to what he could remember.

The feeling was deeper than what Subaru had believed it to be.

——But in reality, was that all it was?

Ram: "…Disgusting."

Subaru: "No, it's not disgusting. Not looking at you with those eyes. You're being paranoid!"

Ram: "Have you gotten yourself up on a pedestal? There is no use."

Subaru: "If I'm on a pedestal, aren't you putting yourself on a *kamidana*[46] and looking down on others?"

Ergo, it was safe to say that the relationships had not deviated from their routine of light-hearted conversations.

Even though the mood could change instantaneously, and those warm feelings could turn into cold-hearted hostility.

For the time being, they could not help but not hate the other.

Anastasia: "Be careful 'bout Natsuki-kun's behavior. I wonder what's the cause?"

Ram: "Did you also notice that, Anastasia-sama?"

Anastasia: "Well, seems that Natsuki-kun's obviously affected to some extent. I think."

Subaru was being invaded by the paranoia of suspecting anything and everything, Ram and Anastasia looked at each other as if they had an inkling of what was going on with him. Rather, only Subaru knew the real reason.

With the perception and insight the two had, they were becoming even more wary. Alas, it was clear that Subaru's every move was being carefully observed to an annoying extent as they were conversing.

[46] A *kamidana* is a miniature altar in Shinto religion, one to have at home, to enshrine a deity in the home of a believer. For more information, see here.

Subaru: “Annoying… I’m an idiot.”

Anastasia: “Did’cha say somethin’?”

Subaru: “Just the extent of my stupidity. So, what do you think?”

As he wrapped his head about his own sensibilities, Ram and Anastasia’s heads puzzled over it[47]. Then, in response to Subaru’s question, they both turned towards the front.

By looking ahead according to that movement, it was plain to see what was meant by that.

——A fork had appeared in front of their eyes.

Anastasia: “I’ve felt a disgustin’ wind flowin’ in for a while now… Now I realize why.”

Ram: “This bad wind invokes discord. As Meili described it, Barusu’s body odor seems to summon Witchbeasts. And by nature, their affinity is bad… No, I wonder if it’s good.”

Subaru: “Do you know what this disgusting feeling is?”

Ram: “Multiplying Barusu’s present condition with Barusu’s body odor would yield the same.”

Subaru: “Don’t say «body odor» so many times.”

In the past two loops, they had unanimously agreed on the “bad feeling” subject. Then, Subaru’s current physical condition and present circumstances were intertwined. Thus, a different opinion was born.

Ram and Anastasia looked at each other and nodded together,

Ram & Anastasia: “Miasma.”

Subaru: “The Witch’s, huh. Then, going ahead would mean…”

[47] A bit of a pun here, as the same verb (捻る) can be used for “wrapping one’s head around something”, “wrapping something around something” (like a cord around a pole), and “being puzzled over”. Thought it was neat.

Anastasia: “Tho’ I ain’t sure, it’s a well-known fact that the Witch’s Shrine lies beyond the Sand Dunes. Oh, and since the distortion of the sand sea’s been solved, and it’s now connected by some accident…”

Ram: “It turned out to be an unexpected shortcut, something like that. And because of that.”

It had been determined that the cause of their souls becoming corrupted, and the discord that had been stirred up, concluding in having them killing each other, was the Miasma.

On top of that, Anastasia pointed at that way with an ironic smile, speaking of the possibility of a terrifying existence.

A two-way fork, with Miasma drifting from the right, and the Centaur’s lair on the left.

Of course, he intended to smoothly explain the threats lurking in the road to the left after this—— But for the time being, which way should they go?

Anastasia: “So, which way do ya think is the right answer?”

At Anastasia’s question, Subaru and Ram exchanged glances.

But, without the slightest deviation in their voices’ synchronicity, they spoke.

Subaru & Ram: “——Left.”

That was how it went down.

Arc 6 Chapter 17 – The King of the Sand Sea

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 5 “The Watchtower Guardian”, Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) and WintryOne — Complete

The Non-Combatant Squad unanimously opted to take the left path in the fork.

It was evident that if they progressed down the right path, they would end up being swallowed up by the Miasma, resulting in discord arising that would develop into them killing each other. For that reason, there was no mistake in that choosing the left path was the most natural thing.

That, and for Subaru, the questions were providing him answers too. Though, since the left path was not exactly a safe bet either, the one who was setting him those questions was of ill nature.

If he labelled the right path as an emotional snare, then he would have to label what awaited them on the left path as a physical snare.

That grotesque Witchbeast clad in flames—— the Centaur, he would prefer to avoid meeting it if possible.

Even if he engaged in battle with it, his odds of success were slim, that much was obvious. Their difference in strength wasn’t the only issue. The reason being that when the time came to encounter a Witchbeast in his current emotional state, he did not hold any belief in himself about whether he could fight alongside Ram and Anastasia.

Subaru: “To tell you the truth, there was a time back at the Sand Dunes where I saw a damn weird Witchbeast in the distance. It had a human body sprouting up from the neck of a body that looked like Patrasche’s, and it had a huge mouth gaping from abdomen to chest there. And finally, a huge horn sprouted up from its human body, where the head should be…”

Anastasia: “Ehhh… What the hell. That’s soo gross…”

Ram: “Honestly, that’s so off-putting.”

They followed the same flow of Witchbeast-related talk as last time, in which he naturally included his explanation about the Centaur’s particularities. The reactions from the two female members of the group in response to his description—— Three, including Patrasche, were once again unpleasant.

It was not as if Subaru wanted to give this explanation because he wanted to. Nevertheless, he had to consider that there was a seventy-percent chance that an encounter with that thing, now that they were going down the left path, was unavoidable.

Subaru: “I’d expected all of you to be charmed by it, but in any case, it definitely seems like a dangerous creature. For the time being, I’ll go ahead and call it a Centaur, but it’s not just that its appearance looks disgusting, the mane on the back of its body burns up into flame… It seemed crazy strong. To say the least, it doesn’t seem like we’d be able to beat it.”

Ram: “Why did you ignore a Witchbeast like that after spotting it? Do you have a death wish?”

Subaru: “Ahhh?”

He had explained it whilst keeping his emotions from billowing out as much as he could, however anger had welled up in him the moment Ram had replied in her usual frivolous manner. Despite him having expressly warned her, who did she think she was?

She always arrogantly looked down on others, and with that on his mind, he felt his anger morphing into hatred. Subaru took a deep breath. He did everything he could to keep his violent emotions in check, to settle himself down.

Subaru: “Damn this…! This place is the worst.”

Ram: “It sure is demanding, isn’t it? Even Ram must pay attention to the language she picks.”

Subaru: “If you’re going to choose them now, then you know, perhaps, that they aren’t gonna make anything better.”

Both Ram’s voice and expression were tinged with sympathy for Subaru who was overwhelmed by his emotions.

However, as her sympathetic attitude kept irritating him, he had to say that what she had done too had ended up producing the opposite effect.

Anastasia: “It’s easy to talk about the effects of the Miasma, but that ain’t all that’s scary about it, don’t’cha think? In reality, me ‘n Ram-san ain’t affected.”

Subaru: “What do you mean by that? If you’re thinking flowery thoughts like, only we will be okay, then you’d better stop. If we scratch off the surface, me and you are the same.”

Anastasia: “Such haaarsh words. I didn’t mean that even I’ve got that much self-confidence. One’s capacity for judgement ‘n determination, ‘n so on, are different issues to the strength of one’s mind and body… Hooowever, goin’ about it like you’re completely paralyzed by the scariness of the Miasma’s pretty bad, don’t’cha think?”

Anastasia offered her candid advice to him, phrased with an air of superiority.

Though her words were rational, Subaru grew irritated that she had missed the point. Standing at the head of the group, Subaru had pressed his prior point to her as he marched on through the passageway of sand.

On hearing that, Anastasia cleared her throat with a small “Ahem-ahem”, and said,

Anastasia: “What I have to say’s related to the Miasma… Tho’ since it’s not like even I know too well ‘bout it, can ya forgive me if what I say’s rough ‘round the edges?”

Subaru: “I imagine the only ones who really know all the details about it are the Witch Cult, right?”

Anastasia: “Indeed, but in this world there’s also the kinda people who like to poke into things which people despise. For example, there’s the weirdos who go ‘round studyin’ stuff like Miasma, eh? Though, what I know ‘bout it is somethin’ which barely resembles the truth from a rumor of a rumor of a rumor.”

Was what Anastasia had brought up surmised to be a Witch Researcher?

It had a strange ring to it, but it would be pretty silly to presume they did not exist, if he thought about it. This world likely had people like researchers too. And of course, all such individuals who possessed

this thirst for knowledge would rationally avoid searching for taboos and keep in line with the flow of the world—— No, there was no way they would possess such an upright, pious nature.

There would be incarnations of curiosity who would not fit in with the mold, whichever world or era it may be.

Anastasia: “Tho’ before I dive straight into what I know from that rumor, we hafta ask first of all, what’s Miasma?”

Ram: “It is… the contaminated Mana which the Witch and Witchbeasts let off, correct? I have also heard that Witch Cultists let off the same thing passively.”

Anastasia: “Ram-san’s answer is the prevailin’ view. The Miasma’s somethin’ which the Witch gives off, so even the Witchbeasts created by the Witch emit it in a similar fashion… However, have ya heard of this?”

Ram: “————”

Anastasia: “Have ya heard that Witch Cultists ‘n Witchbeasts in fact really detest each other.”

Anastasia, or rather, Eridna, spoke without pause. Knowing what her creator was like, they were fond of flaunting off their own knowledge, perhaps. It looked like Anastasia’s gilded plate had been torn off and underneath it, the white fox’s true nature had showed through.

Ram’s eyes widened at Anastasia’s words, in stark contrast to Subaru, who had harbored that impression.

Both Witchbeasts and Witch Cultists were creatures that she thought were loyal to the Witch of Envy. Perhaps she was surprised to learn that in the truth they did not get along.

Ram: “I can barely bring myself to believe that… But, is that for real?”

Anastasia: “Unfortunately, I don’t know for sure, since I ain’t acquainted with either any Witch Cultists or Witchbeasts. That’s why I introduced it as somethin’ from a rumor. But, don’t’cha think it’d be interestin’ if this were a true story?”

Subaru: “Interesting…?”

Subaru responded, having gotten the impression that she should not have described it that way to begin with. Anastasia replied to him with a curt nod with a "Mhm",

Anastasia: "Everyone in the world thinks that the Witch 'n the Witch Cultists 'n the Witchbeasts are good friends, right? 'N yet, it ain't known that, in fact, the two of 'em under the Witch are hostile towards one another. This misunderstandin's gone on overlooked for four-hundred-years… No one knows the actual truth."

Ram: "Surely that is…"

Anastasia: "I apologize for bringin' this rumor forward too, but it seems like there's many misconceptions about the Miasma too. For example, the relation between the Witchbeasts and the Miasma's the exact opposite than what's known, in that the Witchbeasts loathe it. 'N it's said that they hate the Witch in their true feelin's as well."

Ram: "——No way could it be like that.[48]"

Ram kept piling Anastasia with her doubts, drawn in by her story.

Behind the two of them immersed in this exchange, Subaru grasped that the words of Anastasia, or rather, Eridna, were substantiated by a rather undeniable factor.

The relations between Witches and Witchbeasts were in fact poor, and Witchbeasts did hate the Witch.

That possibility made complete sense to him, considering how much he had made use of the Witch's Lingering Scent until now. If it was not as such, then why would it have made the Witchbeasts seethe so much, making them frantically pursue him, who was covered in the Witch's Scent?

He had used the Lingering Scent against the first Witchbeast assault he faced after he had been summoned to this parallel world. And he had even used it against the White Whale. It was impossible to

[48] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "All throughout this dialogue, except where translated as such, they were referring to the term «Witch» with just «魔女», so to me it felt a bit unclear whether this meant Witches in general, or the Witch the world knows too well about. I opted for the latter based on the context, but the world does have a meager understanding of the old Witches, so it cannot be discounted that they were using the term to refer to Witches in general."

disregard the relationship between the Witch's Lingering Scent and the Miasma, if he gathered all the evidence he had seen up until now.

——The Witch's Lingering Scent that surrounded him seemed to be Miasma itself.

Subaru: "There's no way that all of these Witchbeasts would have Petelgeuse-like *yandere*[49] attributes. He would not be able to allow something other than the Witch to smell like her, such as these creatures. It'd be like having another woman's scent."

It was disgusting to think about, if that were the case, but the aforementioned possibility was suitable in regards to a logical explanation

In other words, the Witchbeasts hated the Witch's Miasma and regarded it with strong hostility.

And to start with, most people should not know that the theory which stated that the Witch of Envy had created the Witchbeasts was actually incorrect.

For the one who had created the Witchbeasts had not been the Witch of Envy, but rather the Witch of Gluttony.

Since that had not been circulated around, it seemed like nobody noticed the relations between the Witchbeasts and the Miasma as well.

Anastasia's source of knowledge—— Rather, he did not know whether there really was a researcher who had studied the Witch but if they did exist, they sure did make a good point.

Subaru: "…What a complete farce, huh?"

Subaru sighed at his own lack of concern, having thought about it to this extent. It was more natural to think that Anastasia, or rather, Eridna, had just spewed out the knowledge she had known from the start, rather than doubting whether said researcher existed or not.

[49] Character with a personality of being initially sweet, caring and innocent, before displaying traits of someone with an extreme, obsessive and often violent level of devotion to a love interest.

When Subaru's train of thought moved to that, a different form of anger gradually started to take root in him.

Why did Subaru have to hide the circumstances around Anastasia being Eridna like this? There was his consideration towards Julius and the Iron Fang.

In particular, Julius in his current state had completely slipped out from the memories of the world.

Julius tried to act his same old self as much as he could, but even in him, there was a part that was careless about it. Taking that into consideration, Subaru had decided that he should avoid any extra mental burdens.

He should avoid them, but why was it that he had to bear the burden instead?

Subaru: "————"

Everybody was selfish. Why was it just him who had to do everything to cover those guys' asses?

It was irritating. It was annoying. He might as well just spill the beans about everything, shouldn't he? He might as well tell them about Anastasia's Spirit, his Return by Death, everything——

Ram: "…Barusu. Stop sticking your head in the sand all of a sudden, it is bizarre."

Subaru: "It's just my natural defensive reaction to stop our relations from getting any worse. Phaaah."

Since Subaru's anger was reaching its boiling point, he had stuck his face into the wall of sand before he hurled abuse at them. The wall of sand was unexpectedly brittle, and it appeared like he would be able to dig through it with his hands.

In return for finding that out, Subaru spat out sand from his mouth. There was something to think about in Ram's cold expression, but since he was responsible for his own actions, he kept any retaliation to himself.

Anastasia: "Could Natsuki-kun's eccentric behavior also be from the Miasma's influence… perhaps?"

Ram: "No, Barusu's behavior is as usual."

Subaru: “It isn’t the usual! It’s just an aftershock from the Miasma’s influence!”

Anastasia: “Well, regardin’ the authenticity of things there, if we get back to what we were talkin’ ‘bout whilst ya were cryin’ out… The Witchbeasts in truth hate the Witch. If we presume that, then there’s gotta be an explanation for the Witch Cultists ‘n the Witchbeasts bein’ hostile with each other, no?”

Anastasia, who deliberately found a lull in their conversation to shift the topic back to the main point, ponderously inclined her head. However, Subaru’s like-minded opinion did not reach her words. Instead, Ram nodded, and said,

Ram: “Whether the a’re hostile with each other or not, I have never heard… of the two of them acting together. To begin with, there is also the fact that rumors about the Witch Cult do not spread.”

Subaru: “I see…Then it’s really the type of secret organization where those guys keep it hidden and move about in secret. I wonder why they don’t leave any impressions at all, though.”

Ram: “Barusu and Emilia-sama come across those guys far too often.”

All the Witch Cultists which Subaru knew strongly craved the limelight, and were absorbed in an inflated sense of their own self-worth.

He could not even say that Petelgeuse’s movements had been kept surreptitious, and moreover, the other Sin Archbishops had gone all the way up to broadcasting that they had hijacked one of the Great Cities.

How could those guys claim that they were an evil organization that operated in the shadows?

Subaru: “Ah, but wait up. What about the White Whale? That thing was cooperating with the Witch Cult… Though now it’s a bit suspicious whether it was or not, there was still that time.[50]“

[50] A bit of cut content from Volume 8, Chapter 1, Part 5: Petelgeuse all but confirms to Subaru that the White Whale appearing over the Lifaus Highway was intentional (the exact wording is that the mist was used to seal the Highway), which is why Subaru knows that the Witch Cult might be able to either control or direct it. And although this is unknown to Subaru, in Arc 3 Interlude II, “Let’s Eat”, Ley implies that he can control the Whale by calling it his pet. Of course, because of Ley’s speech peculiarities (refers to himself in plural), this could also be understood as either the Witch Cult’s pet, or even the Gluttony siblings’ pet.

Anastasia: “Hmm? Even though I know that the Witchbeasts definitely do hate the Witch Cult, I’m not too sure whether the Witch Cult hates the Witchbeasts… Though, either way, even if it’s not like that, I ain’t gonna fuss over it.”

Subaru: “That’s what I had told you…”

Providing a suitable rebuttal to Subaru’s objection, Anastasia threw down her personal opinion straight away. That she did not cling to it was perhaps indeed proof that she had heard the rumors from another’s opinion.

However, she had thoroughly used it as the basis of her conversation. In the end, Anastasia closed one of her eyes, and spoke,

Anastasia: “In the end, we can just put it as that we don’t understand the relationship with Miasma well. There’s also the way Ram-san looks at it, in which it’s like contaminated Mana… But, well, doesn’t it seem like there’s no one ‘round who can explain what goes on for the Mana to get contaminated like that?”

Ram: “————”

Anastasia: “Mana’s Mana, regardless of whose body it goes through. Even ya can change its nature via magic or the use of magic stones, it ain’t possible for anyone to change the hue of Mana itself.”

Subaru: “That’s…”

Anastasia: “Why’s it that Mana can be contaminated with the Witch of Envy? And also, why the heck do Witch Cultists acclimatize to that contaminated Mana?”

Quite unusually, Ram kept her mouth shut as Anastasia launched this barrage of questions. It was rather strange that she did not raise any words of objection and kept silent. At the same time, Subaru was experiencing a sense of *déjà vu* along with his feeling of revulsion.

The way she had presented it made both her point and conclusion vague.

Everything about her attitude felt like she was speaking in riddles. That she seemed to overlap with Echidna left him quite the sour taste.

Anastasia: “Aight, aight, aight, it seems like we’ve spent too much time idly gossipin’, don’t’cha think?”

Anastasia suddenly spoke out without any consideration for Ram’s silence or Subaru’s cathexis.

The tone she had been speaking in up until now suddenly changed, leaving them behind with the abrupt change of subject. Leaving the two of them in her wake, Anastasia shone her lantern at the front part of the passageway.

Subaru also stopped in his tracks, imitating her. And as he held his lantern up, he noticed what was up.

Subaru: “————”

In front of them, the passageway gradually turned to the left, and a faint breeze blew towards them. The wall of sand still had not changed in any respect, but he vividly remembered that smell of burning that mingled with the breeze, along with that sudden bend in the path.

Ram: “It smells like something burnt, like grilled meat, doesn’t it?”

Ram let out her candid impressions about the breeze which carried a tinge of hot air to it. The smell of over-cooked, charred flesh streamed in from the depths of the passageway.

Maybe it was possible that this aroma was proof that there was someone cooking, and that they would be able to meet a friend party up ahead—— However well-intentioned his thoughts were, they were tantamount to ignorance.

Ram: “Emilia-sama and the others carelessly set up a fire and taking a break… Something along those lines?”

Subaru: “I do agree that Emilia would be the one that’d seemingly set up a fire without any care, but with me mentioning the Centaur, I can’t at all imagine it being that. You too have to believe that this isn’t your head filling up with overly optimistic thoughts, right!?”

Ram: “I am looking forward to how you are going to come up with excuses for all these reckless remarks after the influence of the Miasma is gone.”

Every time he replied in a manner snappier than was necessary to Ram’s questions, he would get toxicity scathingly thrown back from her too.

Letting out a snort to that, Subaru reassured himself that the one he needed to turn his hostility to was not her.

There was no doubt about that, considering they had already made it here. There would be a large cave up ahead, and right there, the blasphemous Witchbeast clad in flame would be awaiting them.

The time they had spent getting here seemed to be a little quicker compared to last time. Nevertheless, considering that they were going to encounter it, perhaps that place was the Witchbeast's burrow. He held no fleeting traces of hope that it would have moved from there. If possible, they would have to——

Subaru: "We've got no choice but to kill it to get past, huh?"

Ram: "I think it more productive of us to come up with a plan that can be put into motion with our current fighting strength."

Anastasia: "We ain't got any fightin' strength even if I use my trump card… 'N even then, I wanna keep that gruellin' thing as a last resort if possible, since I can't undo its effects."

Both Anastasia and Ram opposed Subaru's course of action. Though Subaru was annoyed that he had been denied, even he had no intention of pushing his own opinion on them.

In fact, it would be absurd. He had not dubbed their group as the Non-Combatant Squad for nothing. All the choices which entailed confronting the Witchbeast would probably end up being reckless.

Subaru: "On the other hand, there's no way we can go back and take the right path."

Ram: "After looking at all the different faces you have made up till now, Barusu, I can see that you would not have the guts to go down the right path, isn't that right?"

Anastasia: "But, by sayin' that, it means we're cornered. It wouldn't work to do such a laudable thing as oa go back to where we started from, 'n wait for the others to come look for us… Right?"

Ignoring Ram's flippant reply, Anastasia's reply hit the nail on the head. If he still feared the Witchbeast enough to turn back, then he should have resorted to spinning those words from the beginning and stopping back there. Since he had not, his conclusion had left him with just the option of passing by the Witchbeast.

Thus, that did not mean they could not find a way to accomplish that.

Subaru: “First things first, we need to gather information on our opponent. If everything goes to plan, we have a chance.”

Subaru spoke out, reaching a conclusion before the other two, who were puzzling over a plan, did.

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——Subaru hardly knew anything about the Centaur Witchbeast’s mode of life.

That was due to the fact that he had come across it for only a few dozen seconds before being burnt alive.

All that remained pitifully carved into his soul from that experience was that its grotesque-looking figure made him feel sick to the core, and that it had tremendous firepower. If he briefly thought about it, his manner of death had been such that it felt unavoidable to perceive it as anything other than having been a death in vain.

However, it would be bothersome if he got worked up about it over that.

When it came to unexpected Deaths, Natsuki Subaru was a veteran. By now, he had cultivated enough experience to not treat the phenomenon of Death as just Death.

Subaru: “First of all, we need to pay attention to the Centaur’s appearance.”

Its repulsive appearance was something which one would be unable to forget once seen. Though he had seen it only for a few seconds, its grotesque appearance was seared vividly into his mind. That would give him a helping hand in his reflection.

It had a human torso on top of the lower body of a horse, with its head transformed into a horn. In addition to that, it had a gaping maw across its body.

It looked shoddy, like something half-assed a child would have made out of clay whilst playing. However, there was something he had taken notice of, upon racking his brain without averting his eyes from his memories.

Subaru: “It definitely didn’t have eyes.”

In essence, it did not possess a head in the place where one would usually be found. Thus, he was certain that there had not been any organs on that Witchbeast’s body that provided it with a sense of vision.

Or, since there was no light down in the cave systems underneath the Sand Dunes without being in possession of a lantern, perhaps the negative effects of moving about down there had caused it to de-evolve.

Subaru: “Something like a mole? It adapted to living underground and lost its eyesight.”

Or, he was not sure whether it had an eyesight to begin with; but at least that Witchbeast probably did not rely on it and went on about its business without it.

Back then, the Witchbeast did not seem to have noticed him due to the lantern light. It had noticed him from the noises and indications he had let off from his own carelessness.

Namely, from either a sense of smell or hearing which the Witchbeast would have developed instead of eyes.

Subaru: “If I’m recalling correctly, I once heard that moles have a good sense of hearing to make up for their rather poor noses.”

It was not something he had heard from Anastasia earlier, but rather surely some odd knowledge he had picked up somewhere.

However, Subaru’s guess ended up far more useful than what he clung to in his groundless thoughts. The Centaur’s forte was in its sense of hearing; having come to that conclusion, Subaru sprang into action. Thus——

Subaru: “————”

Without uttering a single word, Subaru swung his arm up and down as quietly as he could. From the moment he stepped onto the sand, he had taken care so that his footsteps would not produce any sound from crunching against the sand.

The thing he had thrown from the extremity of his arm was one of the flasks of water they hadput in their survival kit. Devoid of any particular aim, the flask flew straight forward to the end of the large cave—— drawing the attention of the fiery Witchbeast in the middle of the cave to where it had landed.

Centaur: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

As soon as the flask of water landed on the sand with a quiet clunk, the reaction of the Centaur, who heard it, was dramatic. Shaking its blazing mane, the Witchbeast leapt up with its horse body and galloped forward to the source of the sound. It ferociously rammed its body there with no trace of hesitation.

Centaur: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

Sand billowed up, and flickering sparks flew about around the cave.

Thrashing about violently, the Centaur skidded around. It gnashed the fangs inside its huge gaping maw together and continued to let out a shrill yowl which sounded like the cries of countless babies crying.

It stamped on the flask of water, crushing it flat, and set it aflame over and over again. Once the Centaur reduced its original shape to nothing, it let off more flames, brimming from its mane onto the sand. And when everything other than the parched sand had been burned to a crisp, the Witchbeast stopped in its tracks with a hint of satisfaction.

It did seem to look satisfied. Whilst looking at its handiwork from the corner of his eye, Subaru shook the string he had attached to his waist and motioned them forward. The sound of them carefully stepping on the sand was drowned out by the shrill cries of the Witchbeast that permeated all across the cave.

Taking absolute care with each step, they crept on forward one step at a time——

Subaru: "————"

Subaru tugged at his string, indicating a halt to their march, stopping his advancing ground dragon in its tracks.

To his surprise, the ground dragon, who should not have been able to understand human speech, had faithfully followed his instructions. It had slowly trodden along the sand with a prudent gait that was not befitting of its large build.

——Subaru and the others were conducting a march along the precipice of death in that cave coated in darkness.

Come to think of it, the width of the cave was probably around the size of a school gym, or thereabouts.

They were in an area where the charred corpses of the creatures that had been incinerated by the Witchbeast had fallen just about everywhere. Subaru and the others were trying to move across and get past the Witchbeast by trying to silence their footsteps and breathing.

Subaru: "————"

The area was not such that only quietude like that of the grave would descend upon.

The Centaur's ridiculously large maw was panting wildly over and over again. The sound felt like the awkward sort that would be produced by air coming out of a balloon.

It was not just its appearance, but also its behavior that was repulsive—— Nevertheless, he was thankful that it was acting so plainly right now. Thanks to that, he had managed to come up with a plan that would not involve fighting.

Subaru: "————"

Once again, Subaru took out another flask of water and threw it behind the Centaur. The simple-minded Witchbeast reacted to that sound and once again fiercely assailed the empty flask.

Flames and the cries of babies permeated the cave, and the flask of water burst open thanks to the Centaur's immense heat. With a parched sound, the flask turned to black charcoal.

Regardless of that kerfuffle, Subaru and the others moved forward and managed to shorten their distance to the passageway during that time.

——This simple diversion was the conclusion Subaru had reached from observing the Centaur's mode of life.

Having deemed that it was without eyesight, Subaru determined that the Centaur relied on its sense of hearing. Leaving Ram and Anastasia behind him, he had attracted the Witchbeast's attention by using that same method of throwing stuff. He had repeated this demonstration a few times until he won over their confidence.

The Centaur was a Witchbeast that sought its prey using its sense of hearing. And on top of that, it was a simple-minded creature that could be tricked a bunch of times with the same method.

So long as he had been able to ascertain that, the rest came easy.

He had made Ram gather the items for the diversion as well as made her read where the exit was using the wind, for after they made their escape past the Witchbeast. After that, he had scrupulously told Patrasche about their covert plan, and the need to keep a strong heart so not to succumb to stress or anxiety, and to just put her game face on.

Subaru: "————"

In actuality, Subaru's tactics were working really well to the point that it felt anti-climatic. The distance between the cave and the passageway had already been half-cleared, and the time they had spent stressing was not all that much. Since it had no capacity for intuition, the Witchbeast would probably be clearable by repeating the same thing over and over.

Subaru: "————"

Of course, they had turned off the light of the lantern, and the only thing they could see was the Centaur's blazing mane crackling in the distance.

The lantern-light likely would not have affected the sightless Witchbeast, but still, they had made the bourgeois decision of narrowing down anything which could trigger its senses as much as they could.

Subaru: "————"

Feeling the string being pulled, Subaru's attention, which had wandered off in thought, was brought back to the present. He was holding two strings as he put the diversion into effect. One of them was fastened to Patrasche, whilst the other was held by Ram who was riding on her.

The instructions he had set to Patrasche were "Stop" and "Go", however, the connection between him and Ram had not been particularly well-stipulated. It was just there to get each other's attention.

Even so, the connection between the two of them using the string that merely conveyed their presence, without being able to look face-to-face or exchange words, was something that settled Subaru down a rather surprising amount.

Having this for now made it so that Subaru would not bear any ill feelings towards Anastasia or Ram. He was in a state of mind in which it felt easier for him to not look at someone else's face.

On the other hand, it did not mean that no anxiety was nestled in his heart, which had grown at ease to such solitude. Subaru had convinced himself that it was partially due to the Miasma's influence—— However, many parts of the story which Anastasia had told them earlier regarding what Miasma was had become cloudy.

Would he be cured from its effects when they left this place? In truth, that also felt doubtful now.

Supposing he was not cured from it, would he end up being unable to get rid of these unpleasant feelings even when he met Emilia and Beatrice——

Subaru: "——!?"

The string was suddenly pulled with strength, causing Subaru to unintentionally pitch back. The string that had been pulled was the one that was fastened to Patrasche. The ground dragon had made a snap decision to stop him by force.

And right as he lifted his face up, he immediately saw why——

Subaru: "——Uh."

A clump of fire hurled past a step ahead of Subaru.

The clump of fire was approximately the same size of a football, but it hurtled past spraying waves of heat to its surroundings. It crashed against a wall of sand a few metres away, letting out a violent booming noise, followed by an explosion.

A hot wind gusted out, one that scorched Subaru's cold body. He barely managed to stop himself from screaming.

It would definitely have landed a direct hit if Patrasche had not halted him. He did not know whether it had enough power to kill him, but he was sure that it possessed enough firepower to injure him. Subaru gritted his teeth realizing that he had barely escaped with his life as a shiver ran down his spine.

Why had the fireball been thrown at Subaru?

Subaru: "————"

Subaru reflexively turned to look behind him.

The Centaur should have been deceived by his diversion, and should have been messing around with the water flask on the other side of the cave. However, the Witchbeast now had turned its horned head to where they were, snarling.

Just as if it were confident that Subaru and the others were standing there.

Subaru: "————"

No way could that be it, Subaru shook his head.

Subaru unfastened a water flask from his waist and took hold of it so he could set up the diversion again. The string which connected him with Ram was constantly being tugged, beckoning him, but he took no note of it.

His highest priority right now, was to lure the Witchbeast's attention away from them.

He swung up the flask of water into an arc and threw it far to the left of the Centaur, where it dropped onto the sand. And just as he expected, the Witchbeast's attention turned to that spot and the clumsy beast was attracted to the obvious diversion.

Once again, flames gushed out and the lament of crying babies echoed out. And whilst the shrill echo reverberated across the cave, Subaru urged Patrasche onwards towards the exit[51].

They just had to keep repeating this predetermined routine over and over again.

With just that, they ought to be able to break past, however——

Subaru: "——Hk!"

Once again, the fireball thrown by the Centaur hurtled past next to where Subaru was walking.

It had gotten even closer than last time, with the shot being so accurate as to graze his skin. Subaru's breath was instantly taken away from him by the fireball's explosion, and he was buffeted by the wave of heat.

Subaru: "————"

Bathed in the illumination of the newborn orange source of light ahead of him, Subaru locked eyes with the Witchbeast in the distance. Their eyes did not actually meet, though, so saying they had locked eyes was not quite right.

However, the Witchbeast's attention was clearly focused this way. The Witchbeast had no way to track them except by sound, so why was it able to find them in the middle of its own cry——

Subaru: "Its own… cry…"

Ram: "Barusu, the echo——"

As the question and answer came together in Subaru's mind, Ram, who was still pulling the string, finally called to him and made a sound. At the moment they both came to the same conclusion, the Centaur kicked the sand.

[51] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "The exit is another passageway by the way, sometimes it is just translated to «exit» because it sounds more clear in English, rather than using the ambiguous word «passageway» that could refer to where they came from."

Its hooves kicked the surface of the sand, and the Witchbeast, which was so large they had to look upwards at it, flew easily through the chilly air. The heat of its blazing mane increased as it moved, and all at once was streaking towards Subaru's group.

The human torso attached to the horse's body raised its arms, and pulled away pieces of its own flaming mane. While held in its hands, those pieces changed into balls of fire, and after the blink of an eye, became explosive flaming bullets.

Subaru: "——! Runrunrunrun!!"

At this point, avoiding a fight with the Centaur was no longer possible.

Discarding the plan to move with as little noise as possible, Subaru slapped Patrasche's hips, ordering her to run immediately to the corridor.

Subaru's group was currently in the exact center of the cave, far from both the corridor they had entered from, and the one they were moving towards; a position so advantageous for the Centaur that it seemed likely this had been the Witchbeast's plan.

Subaru: "Was it playing about with us…!?"

Centaur: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

Subaru's mind froze in amazement, but the Witchbeast did not relent. Hurling the fireballs as it created them, the Centaur blew clouds of sand into the air around its fleeing targets, as if playing with them.

The Witchbeast had expected that they would run straight for the corridor. Having said that, even if they attempted running a zigzag course to confuse it, its hearing captured every sound, and so it would not be deceived by such a trick.

Subaru: "Woah! Uwah!"

Grazing their lowered heads, the fireballs were thrown one after another.

Out of sight, the Witchbeast ran circles around Subaru and the others as they fled, not letting up with its explosive barrage, hurling bursts of sand into the air.

Subaru: “Gah——!?”

The heatwave of an explosion at his feet lifted Subaru into the air like he was nothing, and sent him flying.

He quickly protected his head with both arms, but the rush of hot air burned the inside of his nose and throat. Breathing was painful, and with the inside of his nose scorched, he temporarily lost his sense of smell.

Subaru rolled on the ground from the agony in the center of his face, then raised his teary-eyed face.

The mouth in the Centaur’s torso was open wide, and the toothy maw was emitting an ear-splitting noise, almost looking like it was laughing. No, it was actually laughing.

Laughing at the weak human plaything, that could not even win a battle of wits with a Witchbeast.

Subaru: “Shit, argh…!”

Hatred boiled in him, and gave Subaru the strength to stand.

Compared to suspicions and mistrust, what a wonderfully healthy feeling it was to hate the vermin that opposed him. As he was swallowed up in a blackness of distilled fury, Subaru snorted at the Witchbeast that looked so pleased with itself.

Acting like it had won was laughable.

How could a lowly Miasma-hating Witchbeast think it could ever hope to beat Natsuki Subaru?

Subaru: “————”

Putting a hand to his waist, he took out his whip.

Letting his hand remember the feel of the handle, he lightly flicked the sand with the end of the whip; the Centaur immediately stopped its roaring laughter, and intently turned its ears towards the crack of the whip.

Most likely, it was the first time the Witchbeast had ever heard that sound.

However, that was not Subaru's real plan. The whip was nothing more than a diversion.

Subaru: "——Invisible Providence."

In response to the Witchbeast's violence, a roiling, seething black emotion formed in Subaru's heart.

Given direction, it turned into strength to tear the Centaur limb-from-limb. Using it this way made him look like a one-trick pony, but he cared not. It was a trick that would work on anyone.

Subaru: "————"

Swinging the whip above his head, he let the Witchbeast listen to the sound of it splitting the air.

Taking care not to alert the Centaur, which was paying close attention to the first sound, the invisible magic hand advanced like it was slipping through the darkness, infiltrating the Witchbeast's shadow, aiming for the horn atop its human torso.

Between the human body and the horse body, he could not tell which one had vital organs. With its head being a horn, if there was a brain stuffed inside it or not was a mystery. Despite that, there had to be a vital organ of some kind inside. With that decided, he would crush the horn in the palm of his invisible hand.

If the loss of the horn happened to make the Witchbeast obedient, he would simply have it kill itself. That would be much more pleasant——

Subaru: "——!? Guh, agh, gah!?"

With that thought, it happened just as he was about to carry out his plan.

Focusing on the Centaur, his Unseen Hand reaching for its head, Subaru's own head was filled with a burst of unimaginable pain. Feeling as though something had stripped away his scalp and was drilling directly into his skull, his eyes rolled back, and yellow foam frothed from his lips as he fell to his knees.

Subaru: "Gah, AHH!? Guh, agh!!"

Bringing both hands to his head as he knelt, he struck himself on the side of the head to try and fight off the pain. Rubbing his head, holding his head, nothing else helped with the pain. To fight the pain, he

tried to inflict a sharper, stronger pain. He struck himself again, and again, but no matter how hard he hit himself, he could not overcome the pain.

He rolled on the sand while his head felt like a hell full of thorns piercing his brain, and nearly fainting from pain, Subaru ended up swallowing sand without understanding why.

Subaru: “It hurts! Agh! It hurts it hurts it hurts! It hurts!”

He shouted, like he was spitting blood.

With a mouth full of sand, chewing it with his back teeth, Subaru thrashed on the ground, fighting against the mysterious pain to keep it from blocking his throat. He could not fight it, he was losing.

Of course, Invisible Providence had vanished instantly.

With that dispersed, he had no way of affecting the Centaur. The Witchbeast, as though disappointed with his lack of resistance, prepared to turn him into a smoking corpse with the use of a fireball.

A huge ball of flame drove away the chill in the air as the explosive heat warmed the world around them. Just like that, Natsuki Subaru would be changed into charcoal——

???: “————!”

At the last moment before that, the jet-black ground dragon charged in fiercely, tearing away the Witchbeast’s arm.

Patrasche: “————”

With a body color that blended into the darkness, the ground dragon had soundlessly approached the Witchbeast, and landed a biting attack. Losing its balance along with its arm, the Witchbeast dropped the fireball it had raised above its own head.

In other words, the heat of the fireball the Witchbeast had created exploded at its own feet, and the point-blank blast wave blew it into the air.

As it was thrown away by the explosion, blood dripped from the Centaur's wounded arm, and it fell over on its back. Without sparing it a glance, Patrasche sprinted over the sand, and, holding Subaru's clothing with her teeth as he thrashed in pain, she immediately began a sprinting retreat.

Held by Patrasche's teeth near his waist, swinging left and right as he dangled, tormented by poor circulation and the continuing headache, Subaru looked behind him.

Behind Patrasche, the Centaur unsteadily rose to its feet.

The wound on its human torso foamed, and the left arm that had been bitten off grew back in an instant. Its monstrous regeneration ability was at work on its other injuries as well. The wounds all over its body, inflicted by the explosion moments ago, closed one after another. The Centaur returned to full health in a matter of seconds.

With that done, there was nothing left to slow it down.

Screaming viciously at Patrasche, who had struck it by surprise, the Centaur sped up to pursue the madly fleeing ground dragon, and its mane blazed brighter as it leapt.

Patrasche's running ability was impressive in even the worst terrain, but the Centaur was in its own habitat, and so, its acceleration was a step ahead. Along with their difference in size, Patrasche was weighed down by Subaru, and the Witchbeast was soon running side-by-side alongside her.

A burning fireball appeared in the Witchbeast's hand, but this one was stretched tall. Looking closer, the fireball changed in the Witchbeast's hand to a long-handled weapon, and in the blink of an eye, it had become a spear, covered from end to end in flame.

Centaur: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

Raising the flaming spear, the Centaur drove the tip towards Patrasche. The black ground dragon ducked as the spear approached, almost diving into the sand to avoid the attack and using that as an opening to speed up further.

However, just when it looked like they could get away, the Witchbeast's hoof kicked into the ground dragon's torso from the side. The force of the attack passed through her hard skin, and she cried out as the impact smashed into her internal organs. Even then, she refused to drop Subaru, still dangling from

her teeth. The heat he could feel near his waist was from the blood Patrasche was coughing up from her internal injuries.

That was the only sign she was badly injured.

However, Patrasche would still not let go of Subaru, and Subaru had no way to care for his loyal dragon's wounds. All he had was the seemingly eternal torture of the unending pain in his head.

Ram: "——El Fula!!"

Anastasia: "Jiwald——!"

A second strike from the flaming spear was aimed at Patrasche, who was clearly slowing down. However, before it reached the ground dragon's figure, it was interrupted from two different directions.

From one side came an invisible blade of wind, from the other was a convergence of white-hot rays of heat.

Both the incantations came from familiar voices, but that was all Subaru could say for sure.

The two spells landed direct hits on the Witchbeast, blowing holes through its body and sectioned the human torso at an angle—— Those wounds, too, closed instantly.

Ram: "Barusu…! Oh, fine, if you're dead, you should say so!"

Anastasia: "It's a nasty one, that Witchbeast… I won't be able to do much to that thing."

Even though it sounded normal, one of the girls' voices carried a trace of desperation. On the other hand, despite being in a desperate situation, one of the girls' voices lacked any sense of stress.

Feeling his loyal dragon's breath and spat-out blood on his skin, Subaru was on the verge of falling unconscious. If he was going to go through this much pain and torment, maybe dying wasn't so——

Ram: "Don't you dare die, Barusu! Rem would cry!"

Subaru: "…Oh."

That voice, shouted right in his ear, cut through the pain and reached his brain.

What the voice awakened however, was a hatred no less than the one he held for the Witchbeast.

They had forgotten. Not a single one of them remembered that girl.

——Don't talk about Rem and I like you know anything about it.

Subaru: "——INVISIBLE PROVIDENCEEEE!"

Releasing his feelings of anger towards the Witchbeast passing through the edge of his tear-stained vision, Subaru struck at it with a pitch-black magical hand in an outburst of rage.

Partway there, another raging pain tore at his skull—— before it swallowed him and he lost consciousness, Subaru's Unseen Hand made a direct hit to the Witchbeast's spear, breaking it as a token act of defiance.

——But that was all the resistance he could muster.

Centaur: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

The reward for his angry counterattack was another burst of furious pain.

The Centaur planted its front legs in the sandy ground and pivoted on them, turning itself around forcefully, and then its rear legs lashed out like a catapult.

Its solid rock-like hooves kicked sand into the air as they sped towards Subaru's group—— himself, Patrasche, and Ram and Anastasia who were likely nearby as well, intending to tear through them all at once.

In an explosion of leg strength sufficient to bring down part of the cave, everyone was sent flying in different directions by the wave of sand. Subaru was even torn away from Patrasche's jaw, rolling helplessly on top of the sand, and thrown by the aftermath of the impact against a destroyed, charred body.

Subaru: "Ah, uh…"

A headache that could not be put into words, and a body trampled by the Centaur's punt.

Assaulted by continuous pain from the inside and out, Subaru could no longer hold on to his consciousness. Somehow, as he rolled loosely on the sand, he could feel the approaching darkness of Death.

Destruction, annihilation, futile death, death in battle. Heartless words like that roamed the back of his mind, but——

Subaru: "————"

In a situation where his lungs had forgotten to even breathe, Subaru witnessed someone standing in front of him.

It was a small, delicate shadow. In a world with too little light, he could not gaze upon it clearly. Even then, it was a familiar shape that he knew immediately. It was Ram. Wobbling as she stood.

She had both arms outstretched, to protect Subaru.

——*Stop it. It's stupid, impossible, useless.*

He attempted to voice it, but his throat would no longer listen to him, as though it was filled with sand—— No, it actually was filled with sand. Because of the sand he had stupidly swallowed trying to fight the pain in his head, Subaru could no longer even speak clearly.

Subaru: "…Wh… y?"

With all his strength, Subaru managed a weak cry. Despite all the pent-up dissatisfaction and anger he had felt towards Ram and his other friends, that surely they must have known about.

Ram: "——Rem would… cry."

Ram made only that quiet response to Subaru's words.

For the little sister she was unable to remember, for the person most dear to that unremembered sister, Ram stood.

What pushed her to go that far, Subaru could not understand.

He could not understand that, but there was one thing he did understand. At this rate, Ram was going to die. Subaru would die too. There was no way to avoid it.

Subaru: "————"

The Centaur bellowed, swinging both its arms and creating a blazing sword in each of them. They did not really take the appearance of like swords, though, so perhaps it had meant to make hammers or axes.

Regardless, they were both weapons wrapped in flame. It stood on the verge of using them to tear Ram's much smaller frame into shreds, and roast Subaru as well.

Subaru: "…Come, come on. There's gotta be… something."

Staring Death in the face, Subaru reached down through the depths of his pain.

Fighting against the relentless pain was like diving deep into himself. Looking outside himself, to Ram, Patrasche, or Anastasia—— was unrealistic.

Even if it would be derided as a dream or delusion, Subaru looked inside himself for something, anything. This unrealistic approach was the most realistic hope he had left.

Diving inside, reaching into the murky depths of his body, pulling aside the writhing black thoughts, Subaru looked inside himself for anything that could help. Not the Unseen Hand he had overused. Something different, something, something new, some way to pull through this mess.

Subaru's last-ditch search yielded——

Subaru: "——Ah"

Nothing, and Subaru watched as the Witchbeast in front of him raised its swords. The flames crossed above the Witchbeast's head, and after a moment's pause, descended towards Ram.

Burning the very air, the oncoming slashes would heartlessly cleave a burning path through the girl's slender body, burn her away, leave nothing of the path she had walked, the memories she had held, or anything at all except black charcoal——

At that scene, Subaru cried out against his own powerlessness——

Subaru: “————”

The next moment, white light was unleashed with tremendous speed, blowing away the Witchbeast’s upper body.

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The body of the Witchbeast which had wielded those swords of flame vanished from the world thanks to that tremendous light. The light did not bring forth such simplicities like crushing or severing its body, but rather, it was the literal meaning of annihilation.

Centaur: “————”

The Centaur was a monster that possessed a human body on the head part of a horse’s body.

And the light had blown away, the part which was construed as its human body from chest up. Of course, that included the arms on its shoulders, the horn which was in place of a human head, and the fanged maw that gaped across its chest.

Blood soundlessly gushed out from the Witchbeast’s wounds from the impact—— And immediately after, its wounds started to foam, readying itself to use the same hyper-recovery technique it had used thus far.

Its squirming flesh swelled up, and its obliterated human body re-formed anew. The human body regenerated right away and explosive balls of fire quickly surged into life on both of its arms.

Centaur: “————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

The Centaur roared, and the alluring voice of countless babies filled the chilly air.

Turning its body around, the Witchbeast paid no heed to Ram or Subaru, and instead leapt straight towards the dangerous enemy that had blown away its upper body.

The Witchbeast summoned an array of fireballs on its arms and cast them one after the other as it rushed forward. Consumed by its heated frenzy, the Witchbeast prepared to unleash its own battle cry.

However——

Centaur: “——KSHEEEEEEGHHH?!”

The fireballs brought into existence by the Witchbeast were all intercepted from in front of it. One. By. One.

The things responsible for that were the flashes of white light that pierced the fireballs head-on with tremendous accuracy. The speed of the flashes of light were out of the ordinary, and its power was clearly superior to that of the fireballs.

The lumps of flame were struck by the light dead-on, sucked in by its powers, and clashed against the body of the Witchbeast itself. Immediately after Subaru had thought the Centaur had ended up like a hedgehog with quills of white light, the flames exploded all around the Witchbeast’s body.

The Centaur’s arms were obliterated to nothing, its maw was torn to shreds, its horse body was burnt and finally it collapsed. The Witchbeast thrashed about on top of the sand, letting off a shrill cry in sheer anger.

However, the Witchbeast’s wounds squirmed over, refusing to die. It was as if it was telling them to grow stronger, to change their approach, and that they should evolve their manner of bestowing death, since they could not achieve it by blowing away parts of it into nothing.

Centaur: “————”

The Witchbeast’s appearance transformed as it regenerated its lost parts.

The human part of its body mutated, its arms now increasing from two to four, and sharp, long fangs jutted out from its maw. Its lower horse-half also had more legs, numbering eight in total. Doing a simple calculation, they had doubled in quantity.

As well as that, its charred skin had hardened, now shining with a black luster to it. At a glimpse, it mayhaps looked like a being clad in armor.

And it held an axe, a hammer, a spear, and a sword of flame in each of its newly added arms. The Witchbeast had managed to evolve itself in an unbelievably short period of time, all to alter itself so it could face the being casting the white rays of light.

Centaur: “————”

Raising its four forelegs, the Centaur thunderously let out a roar. It clacked its raised hooves together with a piercing clang and began to spur forwards.

Its huge figure was similar to that of an armored train decked in steel. Its weight and acceleration would easily turn any opponent to mincemeat, causing them to meet a vicious end.

The being that had put the Witchbeast to shame would end up being completely annihilated if it were treated to a fiery finishing blow.

Centaur: “————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

Kicking sand up into the air and “A white light pierced it” and trailing up “A white light pierced it” a plume of fiery heat, the Witchbeast fiercely “A white light pierced it” broke through. “A white light pierced it” The heat of its flames “A white light pierced it” had flared up “A white light pierced it” hotter than ever before, it was like “A white light pierced it” the hellfire “A white light pierced it” of the abyss. Its grotesque and atypical figure “A white light pierced it” made it so that you couldn’t avoid “A white light pierced it” breaking into shudders when “A white light pierced it” you caught a mere glimpse of it, “A white light pierced it” regardless who you were, “A white light pierced it” that was what the King of the Sand Sea was. “A white light pierced it” “A white light pierced it” “A white light pierced it” “A white light pierced it” “A white light pierced it” “A white light pierced i” “A white light pierced i” “A white light pierced i” “A white light pierced” “A white light pierced” “A white light pierced” “A white light pierc” “A white light pierc” “A white light pierc” “A white light pi” “A white light pi” “A white light pi” “A white light” “A white light” “A white light” “White light”——

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Subaru: “————”

There was nothing left behind anymore right after the crazy amount of light had streamed out.

The Witchbeast, which had wielded such menace, had been completely obliterated by the light all the way up to the smithereens of its flesh. The Witchbeast had completely been blown away somewhere far out of this world.

The only thing left on the sand was the countless number of light rays which had been fired at the Witchbeast to erase its existence—— The source of that came just from those white, elongated stingers[52]. Those too instantly turned to powder as if they had effloresced away.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru had even forgotten his headache as he gazed aghast at the spectacle with his own eyes.

He realized that a feverish, slender body had happened to leap in between his arms. It was Ram. He did not remember what had happened, but it seemed like he had been embracing her body in their final moments.

Though it should have been a meaningless gesture, it looked like Ram was not conscious.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru could hear the sound of someone stepping on the sand.

That someone was ever so slowly approaching Subaru and the others; they were definitely approaching them.

[52] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “Opting to translate «針» as «stinger» this time instead of «needle». Literally, it can refer to any needle-like object.”

The inside of the cave was still enveloped in darkness along with a frigid silence.

The only source of light came from the scattered fiery scraps that had been spewed out by the Witchbeast earlier. There was one such fiery scrap right next to Subaru that allowed him see a few meters around him.

Someone's feet entered the very edge of his field of vision.

Subaru: "————"

Lifting his face up, Subaru looked up to where the owner of those feet—— and perhaps the one behind that light, was. Gradually lifting his field of vision, what he saw reflected in his bleary eyes was, a human being.

Subaru: "————"

It was a woman.

A woman with a rather queer air to her.

Her legs were audaciously bare all the way up to her thighs, and the only thing that covered her crotch was the hem of her shorts that were just barely cut down for that task. Above that, her waist and belly button were exposed. A piece of cloth was wound above her slender waist like a muneate[53] to keep her breasts concealed.

However, she wore something akin to a cloak from her shoulders which barely protected the greater part of her body from her pale shoulders onwards, from the wind.

Her hair was a brown that was closer to black, to the point that it seemed to blend in with the darkness around them. Her long hair was tied into a ponytail that collected all of it together.

She gazed at Subaru and the others with moist eyes chock-full of thick emotion. Her thin lips curved up, breaking into a rather bestial smile.

[53] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "Literally a device that acts as a chest protector for women. As an example, female archers may wear a chest protector called a muneate to prevent their breasts being struck by their bowstring."

???: “——Found you.”

“At least I can understand what she’s saying”, Subaru thought to himself.

And just as he thought that, his consciousness reached its limit.

Tasting the feeling of sand, Subaru let go of his consciousness still without uttering a single word.

At least, it did not seem like letting go of the girl wrapped inside his arms was needed; he held her tight.

He only had enough willpower left to persevere to that point.

Arc 6 Chapter 18 – The Keeper of the Sand Tower

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 21, Chapter 5 “The Watchtower Guardian”, Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (GracedHarperd, Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——Amid the dregs of murky darkness, there was consciousness.

It had been a long time since Natsuki Subaru visited this place.

Much like the several previous times, it was a dark world where there was no end to sky and earth, where only darkness resided. It felt like he had been forcibly summoned to this place just like what happened every time he Returned by Death.

If he were to think about it, this too, was a truly mysterious place.

At any rate, it was not like Subaru could pull out his memories of this place, and bring them to the outside. Despite it not being his first time visiting this place, he would forget entering it after leaving.

A transient feeling, just like as if he were a mere bubble floating by in a dream.

Within this pale darkness, in the narrow gaps of his faint recollections, the consciousness known as Natsuki Subaru on the outside floundered through the air, and slowly swam amidst the jet-black darkness.

With only his consciousness, he rose to the surface; of course, regarding his body, he had gotten used to the feeling of not having his limbs, his eyes, his ears, his mouth.

As well as that, there was the fact that he did not know what was top or bottom, left or right, and the anxiety towards not being able to see anything, including the depths below. All of that did not matter to his consciousness, which was dominated by just one thing.

There was an unbearable, unending passion at the core of his consciousness, or perhaps within the formation of his consciousness itself—— no, more so, it was dear love, adoration, deep unconditional love.

Whenever he came here, he could be with the source of this love.

His consciousness had learnt just this thing, and he was delighted that he could visit this place once again. Before he began to even relish that long-awaited encounter, the feeling that pounded in his rightfully nonexistent chest was one of such joy that he wished to open his rightfully nonexistent lips to sing.

However, the passion of his consciousness was——

???: “He seems to have arrived in high spirits, desu.”

???: “It’s really nothing to joke about. Acting all smug due to just a bit of luck. Have some restraint, even shamelessness can go so far, how unbearable. Do take a long, objective look at yourself, and maybe then you’ll see just how far your impudence has gone.”

Suddenly, he heard them; he was disturbed by voices which, by all rights, he should not be able to hear.

Subaru: “————”

His consciousness turned to look behind.

If neither face nor body existed in this directionless world, then what was the significance in the act of looking behind, was there any? It was not to find a meaning in this, rather it was an act for the sake of giving meaning to it.

To look behind oneself, a body was required. If he consciously thought so, and acted, then the jet-black darkness would have no choice but to give that to the nothingness that was Natsuki Subaru.

Thus, the consciousness which looked back became Natsuki Subaru, now bestowed with vision so he could look around his surroundings, and a body which he could turn back around with.

Yet, that alone was still insufficient, and his body was far off from being complete. This Subaru was an imperfect recreation, the real Natsuki Subaru could not be reproduced at all.

Would it be better if he had hands, or legs, or perhaps a nose and mouth?

——No, making and manifesting a human being out of nothing was not that easy.

Natsuki Subaru did not know nearly enough about Natsuki Subaru to recreate himself.

It was not easy for Natsuki Subaru to complete himself using only his own memories and knowledge.

Therefore, it was impossible currently to make Natsuki Subaru more than this.

However, in that lacking state, the incomplete Natsuki Subaru wasn't even able to recognize this. And that was why the incomplete Natsuki Subaru who had only given his transient body some transient eyes, whilst existing in a state in which he could not even place a foot down onto the ground, spun around to look at his surroundings, and noticed something.

There was something other than the Consciousness of Natsuki Subaru coming to the fore within the depths of the darkness.

Mysterious Voice 1: "Disgusting and shameful, nothing more than the result of self-conceit, DESU! Yes, how very sinful, how dirty you are! Just so so so so worthy of disdain, DESU!"

Mysterious Voice 2: "Subpar, way off from a human, we could say we have the ultimate imperfection here, doesn't it feel like that? What were they even thinking, that a guy like this would kick the satisfied me to the curb? Shouldn't it have been obvious from the beginning if you had known your place? Who are you to stand in my way, a nuisance! A hindrance! Pretty much everything! So lacking! Not enough! Think logically like a human being, come on…! Even if you are a subhuman, akin to the likes of human cattle."

His Consciousness rose to the fore in the darkness, where jeers rained down upon the very much imperfect Natsuki Subaru.

On one side was insanity, and on the other was annoyance, both respectively venting out their hatred towards Natsuki Subaru.

However, unfortunately for Natsuki Subaru, being a mere speck of consciousness, he could not comprehend that hatred.

The heart, the brain of this Natsuki Subaru were not prepared at all to comprehend it. If he were to try and gain an understanding of those words which the Consciousnesses uttered, then just like he materialized some flesh, and just like he had created a sense of sight, he had to bestow upon himself organs to allow him to understand them.

Subaru: "————"

——But, somehow, those organs felt unnecessary.

At least, in order to grasp what those two Consciousnesses were saying, the meaning behind trying to produce such a thing was weak, and above all, he did not feel the urge to do so.

It was not easy to drag out the material from the immaterial. At the very least, if Natsuki Subaru's consciousness did not truly wish for it, then he could neither create nor acquire it.

So as things were right now, he could not help but to postpone bringing forth a mind to understand them, as well as words to reply to the Consciousness of those two. No, actually, there was no ulterior motive behind it.

Mysterious Voice 1: "What insolence! What contempt! What disdain! Here I am, preaching with such diligence, and yet you don't even bother to consider contemplating it, desu. How very… how very, ahh, ahh, ahhh… ! Slothful. You are truly Slothful, DESU!"

Mysterious Voice 2: "How far will you go in making a fool out of others until you're satisfied, damned human cattle…! Listen well, just who do you think I am? I'm the most satisfied man in the world, one who worries about nothing and only wishes to pursue his simple joys and live a fulfilling life, undisturbed and free of Greed, and yet you'd interfere with that? This is a violation of my rights. An act of wickedness. One such as you, who'd crush the dreams of others so easily, must be stopped…!"

Feeling that he was not making any progress, he turned his back to the Consciousnesses of the two.

It was convenient, having this body, to indicate that he possessed no intention of talking to them. He felt that their abusive words would still echo in the background, but he did not mind because, if he showed that he cared, it would be plain enough to them.

His sense of vision worked without even needing to turn back. Right now, what he would probably need was not Vision, but Eyeballs. Should the chance present itself, he would remember to make them.

However, right now, he had no time to deal with such trifling matters.

???: *"————"*

Because, right in front of the consciousness of Natsuki Subaru, the shadow whom he aimed for was showing herself.

Shadow: "————"

In the jet-black darkness, where nothing should have been visible, a silhouette clad in deeper black than the midst of the darkness he was in was far more vivid.

Sometimes, she would freeze Natsuki Subaru's heart, those arms with such graceful fingers would dangle loosely. Though slender, those limbs possessed such tenderness, garbed in a dark dress. As usual, her features were unclear, as everything above her neck was covered by a thick mist. But, Natsuki Subaru understood deep within his soul that there was a someone there that inspired such deep emotions of love.

Her appearance was far clearer than in their previous encounter, and he was far closer to her, distance-wise.

In his previous encounter with her, only her arms and body could be seen, a silhouette, but now it was visible that she was wearing a dress, her bare feet peeking out from underneath the hem of her long dress. Nearly the entirety of her body was perfectly reproduced. The sole aspect that was invisible to Natsuki Subaru was her face, hidden by the blackness.

How irritating. But for now, that was okay.

Stronger than before, he felt her presence ever nearer. However, Natsuki Subaru, though clearer she may be, was not yet prepared to go out and meet her.

Right now, he should simply rejoice that he was so close to her. One day, he would definitely reach out and touch her fingers, embrace her slender waist, and exchange love with her.

Shadow: "——I love you."

Faced with this confession, Natsuki Subaru gave his newly manufactured chin a nod in response.

Through that mere action, the shadow's delight could be felt; accompanying it, an apologetic feeling sprang up.

Next time, a Mouth and Tongue would be necessary so that he could express his words of love from there.

While feeling these profound emotions, Natsuki Subaru's consciousness began to leave this shadow garden, and——

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Though Subaru knew he was good at getting up from sleep, on the flipside, he also knew that he found it hard to fall asleep.

For Subaru, waking up from sleep felt as if he were raising his face above the water's surface. No matter who may be submerged underwater, if their face rose to the water's surface, they would not forget how to breathe.

For Subaru, that breathing signified the rousing of his consciousness, it was fairly natural that he was able to breathe upon waking up.

Emilia: "You get up so well, I'm jealous. I… am reaaally bad at getting up."

This had been Emilia's comment from when they had this conversation before.

Incidentally, when it came to Emilia getting up, there was no exaggeration or humility in the words she spoke, it really was that bad. Emilia did have very low blood pressure, and so it took her about an hour to wake up and get herself out of bed.

Upon getting up from bed in the morning, in her drowsiness she would wait for her to get back to her senses, and only then finally get out of it, wash her face and fix her hair—— that was her style. And on the other hand, unlike Subaru, she slept as well as a child. A stark contrast.

Emilia: "When I was in the forest, and I only had Puck beside me, since Puck didn't come out much at night… I could only do stuff like sleeping…"

This had been Emilia's comment from when they had this conversation before.

And regarding the details of how Subaru had replied to this, those were not to be delved upon. But now that she had someone to keep her company late at night, she should forget about how the past was.

In any case, Subaru was honestly quite envious of how she fell asleep.

Upon lying in bed and closing his eyes in the middle of the night, Subaru wouldn't stop thinking about all kinds of stuff no matters what he did. In particular, what he would think about included all the things he could have done differently, and all the regrets contained in him.

Whether it was about what happened on that one day, or, sometimes, what happened on days long before, regret would torment Subaru without any heed for either time nor means.

When grappling with stuff like that, he was unable to fall asleep at all. That was the source of his poor quality of sleep.

——So, even the events which had transpired beneath the sand sea became a newly planted seed of regret for Subaru. It was practically assured that those would become something that would greatly disturb Subaru's sleeping quality from now on.

Subaru: "…Where, am I?"

At the moment he woke up, Subaru understood that his waking had differed to the usual one from Return by Death.

First of all, there was light in the surroundings. Quite unlike the underground area beneath the sand sea in which he had awoken submerged by darkness, the fact that he was capable of gazing upon his surroundings served as evidence of things having changed. In addition to that, the chilliness had also faded, and his body was embraced by a feeling quite different to that of lying on top of the sand. The soft feeling against his back was perhaps that of a bed.

Below his head there was also something like a pillow there, in other words, Subaru was——

Subaru: “I’m sleeping in a bed…”

Confirming it through spoken words, resting on top of his body was a white cotton blanket.

The feeling of a bed with a pillow was not a feeling he was not familiar with if he really thought about it. Rather, he was really familiar with it; he immediately realized that it was the bedding built into the dragon carriage.

Thus, he was inside the dragon carriage that they had used in their attempt to seize the Pleiades Watchtower.

Subaru: “What’s this doing here…!?”

Subaru sat himself up, understanding that he had been laid down within the dragon carriage that was supposed to have veered off course. In that moment, he noticed that someone was clutching his right hand.

Subaru turning to face his right hand side found a young lady—— kneeling on the floor right next to the bed, her body sprawled out across the bed, sleeping was a girl. It was the silver-haired Emilia who was clutching Subaru’s hand, with somewhat of a look of relief on her face.

Softly breathing, with warmth radiating from the palm of her hand. Subaru let out an exhausted, hoarse breath seeing that she was definitely here.

Subaru: “Ah, ahhhhh… Emilia, that’s you right? Safe and sound…”

Emilia’s form, nestled beside him, left Subaru puzzled, with it not having sunk in yet. Since his right hand was being held, he stretched out his left hand and placed it against her cheeks.

Her pale cheeks were hot, as if she was developing a fever, her skin absurdly soft and smooth. Just by touching them, it felt like love and affection were about to burst out of him, so he fondled them as much as he dared, just to make sure.

Subaru: “Ohhh, there’s no doubt, it’s Emilia… Cute, delicate, warm.”

???: “——You wouldn’t be happening to be doing something inappropriate, in fact. Emilia was terribly worried for you, I suppose. She hasn’t slept for two days, in fact.”

Subaru: “Huuuuuuh!?”

While stroking Emilia’s cheeks, having his fill of her soft breathing, Subaru reflexively flinched at the voice that had abruptly interrupted him. And in a panic he tried to turn his head around, finding that, by the door which connected the living space with the bed he was on, stood a little girl, leaning on it, with a look of disgust on her face.

Subaru: “Bea—”

Beatrice: “Shhhhh, I suppose. I dislike this unreasonable Subaru, in fact.”

Subaru: “————”

Instinctively, he had almost raised his voice, delighted in seeing her again, but he was interrupted by Beatrice just before. Subaru placed his hand over his mouth near instantly, and quietly looked down below at the still-sleeping Emilia. Whilst letting him chew on his words, her stiff expression loosened, leading her to look somewhat happier.

Subaru: “That sure was a close one… Beako. Come over here. Let me hug you.”

Beatrice: “What a foolish thing to say… Well, it can’t be helped, I suppose.”

If he could not show his happiness at this reunion using words, then he had no choice but to show his happiness at this reunion using actions.

With Subaru beckoning her, Beatrice sighed and drew closer to him. The little girl was indifferently playing with her drill curls, and once she had come close to him, Subaru hugged her with his free left arm, firmly embracing her against his chest.

Subaru: “Thank goodness… Seriously, thank goodness. I was really really worried.”

Beatrice: “…That’s Betty’s line, in fact. We couldn’t find Subaru or the sister’s older sister anywhere, and so Betty and the others were all frightened to the core, I suppose. We feared you weren’t alive, in fact.”

Subaru: “Is that so. Were you worried to death about me?”

Beatrice: “Not entirely like… that, I suppose. That’s, in fact, I was worried, I suppose. Really, really… really…”

While embracing Beatrice’s light body, the little girl cast her gaze down and her words faltered mid-sentence. He continued to stroke Beatrice’s hair who nuzzled her head against his chest just as they were, and cherished her reunion with him in silence for a moment.

And after a little bit of time, the silence was broken; Beatrice moved her face up away from Subaru’s chest, with a feeling of relief traced across her features and hopped off of the bed with a boing.

Beatrice: “Anyway, we’ve got to tell everyone aside the sleepyhead Emilia that you’ve woken up, in fact. We were all worried, thinking it was Subaru’s last, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Everyone… Oh yeah, is everyone safe? Even those who got separated from me, and those who were with me?”

Beatrice: “You can rest assured, in fact. Everyone is safe and sound, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I see… I seeee!”

Subaru’s unease faded as he heard Beatrice’s guarantee. He had heard that everyone was safe, her unexpected answer had set his heart at ease.

But, straight afterwards, Subaru jerked his head up, an unpleasant feeling of *déjà vu* resounding from that guarantee.

Subaru: “Wait, Beako. I’m sorry for how short-lived my happiness is. But, is everyone really all right?”

Beatrice: “Ngh, it’s upsetting being doubted by Subaru, in fact. There would be no sense in Betty deceiving Subaru like this, I suppose. I’m not joking, in fact.”

Subaru: “I get that you’re in a huff, but this isn’t the reason why I am doubting you. Even if you weren’t looking to deceive me, that doesn’t mean that I haven’t been fooled… Didn’t we just experience that rather painfully in Pristella?”

Beatrice: “————”

Hearing this, Beatrice seemed to notice the source of Subaru's concern.

After the end of the battle against the Witch Cult in Pristella, Subaru had received an identical report. He had been told that everyone was safe, in fact, that been a correct presumption to make, but——

Subaru: "Let's confirm. There's me, Emilia and Beatrice. In addition there's Rem, Ram and Patrasche. Anastasia, Meili, Gian, and finally… Julius. This is everyone."

Beatrice: "————"

Subaru: "You're saying that everyone… that everyone is here?"

Beatrice: "Don't worry, I suppose. That's everyone, in fact. There's no one that Betty has forgotten, and that Subaru only hasn't, I suppose."

Subaru: "I see… I see. Then I guess I can really be delighted by it…"

Having confirmed everything he needed to confirm, Subaru carefully thought whether there were any more pitfalls remaining. He determined that he hadn't overlooked anything, and finally he found strength in the words which had said that everyone was safe.

Subaru: "Thank goodness. Oh, thank goodness…!"

Beatrice: "Good grief, you sure like to over-exaggerate, in fact. In the first place, when we found out that you, the most likely to attract danger, was okay, we guessed that everyone else was too, I suppose."

Subaru: "Idiot, that's not always true you know! Even if you know it so, anxiety is still anxiety, and worry is still worry. You were crying after finding out I was safe, no?"

Beatrice: "There wasn't any crying or anything, in fact. Just because Betty was pressing her face against your chest, it doesn't mean you should look at it like that, I suppose. You can't prove it, in fact."

With a "Hmph", Beatrice puffed out her delicate chest in a display of fortitude, however her words seemed to be brimming with emotion to the contrary. On top of that, there were traces left on the bed that someone other than Subaru had slept there, at a space on the lower part of the bed with half its size—— Subaru pointed at it and said,

Subaru: “There’s evidence right here that someone crawled in next to me and fell asleep, but even with seeing this dead giveaway are you still going to say that you weren’t worried? “

Beatrice: “That wasn’t Betty, I suppose! This is completely a false accusation[54], in fact. I have no idea what you’re talking about, I suppose.”

Subaru: “No one but you would act like this! Don’t feel embarrassed.”

Beatrice: “You’re wrong, in fact! Ahh, geez, Emilia will wake up, I suppose.”

Beatrice forced a change of subject as they exchanged such frivolous conversations in their usual manner While giving a wry smile at her flushed face, Subaru let out a long, truly long, deep sigh.

Everyone was safe, he was relieved for now to hear those words. When they were at the Sand Dunes, they had been pursued by a herd of Witchbeasts and been split apart, and then Subaru had repeatedly Returned by Death in the underground area of the sand sea. He had no clue how Emilia and the others were doing and what would have happened if he could not have undone it——

Subaru: “…Now that you mention it, it’s like feeling suspicious about everything will only give you boogies, is that what it is?”

Beatrice: “——?”

Looking dumbfounded, Beatrice cocked her head at Subaru who had placed his left hand on his head. For Beatrice, the meaning of that behavior felt cryptic, but to Subaru there was a meaning to it. No, there was no meaning to this behavior itself, but it could be said that the subjectiveness of it all was an important factor.

Subaru: “Beako… You’re the same as always, Beako. Emilia as well is as cute as always.”

Beatrice: “What are you even saying, in fact…”

[54] Punny. The expression “濡れ衣” means “false accusations” as per translation, but it is composed of the character for “wet/damp” (濡) and “clothes/dressing” (衣), much like what would happen if there were traces of someone crying on the bed next to Subaru…

Although she fixed him with a deadpan gaze, Subaru felt no extraordinary sense of discomfort or irritation lacing her words. Toward the sleeping Emilia as well, he felt nothing but trusting love to the two of them.

There was nary a trace of the inexplicable hatred that had tormented Subaru underground left.

Subaru: "Guess I'm alright now, since I'm far away from the Miasma. Though it makes me sick to even leave such a strange thing, of unknown cause and treatment, as is…"

Beatrice: "Subaru, if you still aren't feeling well or you feel anxious about your health, it would be better for you to lie down, I suppose. There's no need for you to get up all in a hurry for now, in fact. In one way or another, just Betty and everyone else will manage to undertake the Examinations[55], I suppose."

Subaru: "…Wha?"

Placing her hand against his forehead, Beatrice had displayed her concern for Subaru, his eyes downcast. Amidst the concern in those words, was something that he had not heard before. Subaru interrupted her without thinking.

Subaru: "What did you just say now?"

Beatrice: "So you can rest, I suppose. It's not like you're taking the day off with no good reason, Betty won't get mad at you for resting when you're not feeling well, in fact."

Subaru: "Though I remember saying such terrific stuff in this feverish talk, it wasn't that part I was referring to, you know? After that… you said something about Examinations?"

Beatrice: "Ahhh, yeah, I did say that, I suppose."

At having heard Subaru hounding her, Beatrice slipped out a "Whoops" in response.

[55] Okay, I wasn't going to do this at first, but because of a lot of later narration lines later that get completely fucked because of prior convention, I have decided to change the denomination of the tower's "Trials" to "Examinations". This will not be unanimous, but it is a much better choice considering the difference in Kanji between Petelgeuse's Ordeals/Echidna's Trials (both are "試練"), and the Watchtower's Trials (written slightly differently as "試験").

It wasn't like she had really wanted to hide it from Subaru, rather, it more so originated from her concern from worrying about wanting Subaru to rest for a bit.

However, Subaru was not much of an obedient person that hearing that would make him keep his peace of mind, and Beatrice knew that well enough.

Subaru: "Beako."

Beatrice: "I know, in fact. I'll give you a proper explanation, I suppose. Really, I thought that it'd be better to talk about it after you settled down… despite that, my mouth slipped, in fact."

Subaru: "It's one of your cute points that you can't hide stuff like this—— In the first place, I've looked the other way on stuff that I ought to have asked you from the start."

He flashed a faint bittersweet smile at Beatrice who had admitted defeat, though the smile quickly disappeared from his face. Subaru more or less lowered his voice and opened his mouth, and directed her some natural questions. That was——

Subaru: "Where are we? And don't go butting in saying something silly like inside the dragon carriage."

Beatrice: "Subaru, I think it's no long stretch of the imagination for you too, I suppose."

Beatrice gave a weary sigh, putting her arms together.

And so, with a click of her heels, the little girl looked up to the ceiling—— no, looking even beyond it.

Beatrice: "——Pleiades Watchtower."

Subaru: "————"

Beatrice: "The Watchtower at the end of those Sand Dunes, Betty and everyone are in it, I suppose."

And that was what she said.

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——He carefully let go of Emilia's hand; she was lying down on the bed, fast asleep since she had stayed up for two days. Subaru slipped out of the dragon carriage after giving her forehead a quick stroke.

Within the dragon carriage which they had spent over a month in, it seemed like there were no changes to it compared to before it had veered off course.

Without so much of a scratch on its body, it looked just as if it were brand new.

Beatrice: "Unlike those who were with Subaru, the ones who were with Betty, swallowed up by the cracks in the Sand Wind, were safe, I suppose. We were hurled away to a different place from that flower field… Everyone with us turned pale when we realized that Subaru and some of the other had been separated from us, in fact."

Subaru: "You as well?"

Beatrice: "Emilia and Julius too, I suppose. Betty wasn't the only one, in fact."

With a "Hmph", Beatrice pouted and averted her eyes from him, opening the door that led to the outside of the dragon carriage. With a squeak of the door, he was greeted by a space of darkness and a dry breeze.

The sensation of the wind outside felt rather like the one present in the Sand Dunes, the darkness outside was close to that of the one in the underground area of the sand sea. However, unlike the Sand Dunes, there was no sand mixed in with the wind, and unlike the underground area, the darkness was less profound.

The cause of this were some magical lamps which had been installed all the way around the area, as well as some densely packed luminous moss which lined the walls around them. The moss near him certainly reminded him of the kind he had seen inside in the Tomb found in Sanctuary. It was certainly quite a handy piece of vegetation to have around, given it grew quite superfluously wherever.

Subaru: "This place is…"

Beatrice: "The Sixth Floor of the Pleiades Watchtower… well, the lowermost floor, I suppose. From looking at the tower from the sand sea, it looks like the Sixth Floor is partially buried beneath the tower, in fact. The Fifth Floor is above the sand… although you might say it's hard to tell, I suppose."

Looking over the circular area, Subaru widened his eyes at hearing Beatrice's explanation. The reason why he couldn't really get the gist of her explanation was probably because Subaru was completely unfamiliar with the interior and the structure of the Pleiades Watchtower.

As far as he could see, the inside of the Pleiades Watchtower was fairly vast and spacious.

In the place Beatrice had mentioned as being called the Sixth Floor, the floor was on one side made of stone, and right in the middle of it rested the dragon carriage. The circular area that spread itself around from where the dragon carriage stood was probably about two-hundred or three-hundred meters in radius.

If the tower was built exactly in the shape of a circle, rather than something more crude like an ellipsis, his mouth would be agape in disbelief at the enormity of the effort it would have taken to construct it.

Subaru: "…Thinking about the pointless work done back in the olden days, doesn't this remind you of stuff like the pyramids? Those are such a massive waste for just one person's tomb. Hmm, wait, no, I've heard some stuff about how they were kinda used as public enterprise, and the unemployed being super grateful for them…"

Beatrice: "I really don't get what you're muttering about again, in fact."

Subaru: "I'm talking about tombstones. Even performing funerals before death were once popular, thinking they were taking preventative measures about what would happen to them after death, that's an idea that hasn't changed since ancient times."

Beatrice: "…Stories about what happens after death aren't good omens, I suppose. Preposterous, in fact."

Hearing Subaru's thoughtless remarks, Beatrice turned her eyes away from Subaru, as if in a sulk. Scratching his cheek, Subaru realized that he had said something he should not have, and so he began petting Beatrice's hair.

Suddenly, he wrapped back around to the front of the dragon carriage, as if having remembered something.

Subaru: “Ohh, Gian! You’re also safe and sound! Gian, you aren’t dead[56]!”

Beatrice: “Why are you saying such inane things all of a sudden, I suppose!?”

Subaru: “Huh, no, I just felt like I needed to do it. But, I am really glad that he’s safe, hehe.”

At the front of the dragon carriage, reined to the carriage itself, was the reliable ground dragon, Gian. Belonging to the Gyras species which had adapted to the desert, resilience was their strong suit. Gian had splendidly managed to survive the difficult circumstances, showing a particularly shameless obstinance to those words.

Subaru: “That said, disregarding the others, you’re the first one confirmed alive!”

Gian: “————”

Subaru: “Oyoy, don’t make such a long face. I said I’m glad. Hey, I will give you a larger share of food later, so cut me some slack.”

Gian: “————”

Subaru: “What is it? Look, I’m a money-on-hand kind of guy.”

Beatrice: “It’s be high time for you to calm your little act down any time now, in fact. He’s tired, so we’re heading off, I suppose.”

The look on Beatrice’s face was one indicating she didn’t want to have anything to do with this, as Subaru had his little joke alongside Gian. In response to Beatrice’s reaction, Subaru with a twist of his neck prefaced with, “My bad, my bad”,

Subaru: “Come now, I didn’t mean to embarrass you, but there’s something I wanted to check.”

Beatrice: “What is it, in fact?”

Subaru: “Well… even though Gian’s here, Patrasche is still nowhere to be seen.”

[56] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “Subaru makes a lame pun in the way he tells Gian he isn’t dead, by using his name, which sounds like the negative in Japanese, and it’s impossible to translate into English well. So I skipped it.”

His fellow ground dragon, Patrasche, it would be normal for her to be reined here to the carriage if she was indeed safe.

However, even after he checked the other side of the dragon carriage, her jet-black beautiful figure could not be seen anywhere. Subaru was uneasy at the fact that her figure, which should be there, was not present, but,

Beatrice: “Don’t jump quickly to conclusions, I suppose. That ground dragon… Patrasche, as we couldn’t keep her on the Sixth Floor, she’s on the Fourth Floor, in fact.”

Subaru: “Fourth Floor? Is that above? Why?”

Beatrice: “She’s getting treatment for her wounds, I suppose. The younger of those sisters… Rem’s figure shouldn’t be there in the dragon carriage either, in fact. Everyone in a poor state was brought up to the Fourth Floor, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Getting treatment… Rem, will she Rem be cured!?”

Subaru jumped at Beatrice’s unexpected words.

A faint look of surprise flitted across Beatrice’s face as she witnessed the strength of Subaru’s reaction, but she kept him at bay by pinching his nose as he drew near to her.

Beatrice: “C-calm down, in fact…! Don’t be so impatient, I suppose…!”

Subaru: “As if this is the time to be calm! Will… Rem be cured? Also, you said Patrasche’s getting treatment as well, what sort of state is she in?”

Beatrice: “Let me start from the beginning! I can’t just say everything all at once, in fact! Just, we put her in a place that is better for her than just lying down, I suppose! The ground dragon is the same too, in fact!”

Subaru: “…Ohh, is that so.”

Subaru, having tried to press for answers, hung his head down despondently. Seeing the energy sap out of him, even Beatrice gave him a sad look. But, the little girl clenched her small fist, and,

Beatrice: “Look, this isn’t a situation where you should feel down, I suppose. Surely, there has to be a way to manage that, in fact. In order to check that, everyone will challenge the Examinations of the Watchtower now, I suppose.”

Subaru: “————”

In order to cheer up the downcast Subaru, Beatrice clumsily attempted to urge him into rousing his spirit. Seeing her attempt, Subaru was taken aback, and he jerked his chin up with a “That’s right”,

Subaru: “My bad, I’m really sorry in retrospect. I’m sorry about worrying you.”

Beatrice: “It’s acceptable to be worried about Subaru, in fact. But at least let Betty worry in a place where she can keep an eye on you, that’d be of great help, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I’ll consider it.”

Subaru ruffled Beatrice’s hair and expressed his gratitude at hearing her sympathetic words.

Beatrice’s hairdo was completely unyielding, and even his attempts at ruffling and disturbing it in this manner were in vain, such was its strength. In any case, under the encouragement of Beatrice, Subaru turned his eyes towards the top of the tower.

Subaru: “This is the Sixth Floor… At any rate, we can just go up, right?”

Beatrice: “Perhaps, Julius and the others are in the middle of an Examination right now, so it might be best to meet with the Sage face-to-face and ask them for some more details beforehand, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Sage…? Huh, now that you mention it…”

In the middle of Beatrice’s words, Subaru caught hold onto the word, Sage. In spite that in the first place they had come to the Watchtower to meet with the Sage, Beatrice had not mentioned anything to do with the Sage up until now.

Subaru: “Beako, I guess you already met the Sage? What sorta bastard were they? Did you talk to them and complain about the white light beams which zinged towards us?”

Beatrice: "…I don't really want to talk about the Sage too much, in fact. Well, no, I suppose. Perhaps, when it comes to the Sage, it'll be simpler if you met them in person, I suppose."

Subaru: "You know… I don't remember ever having met any normal guy face-to-face, with the way you're speaking about them. If I recall, I feel like I was told something similar by Emilia-tan when I first met with Roswaal."

It had already been more than a year ago, but he remembered the conversation from back then vividly. He remembered that she had explained it like this, "I think meeting and talking to him will be easier to understand him than talking to each other about him", in relation to Roswaal.

In reality, she thought that he would not have received the impact unless he met with him in person, and that he would not be on the same wavelength in conversation, but, well, now it was far too late for what happened back then.

Beatrice: "If you meet them, you'll understand, in fact."

Subaru: "…Understood. In any case, we should go and try and meet them. How do we get above?"

Beatrice: "Stairs, I suppose. If you look closely, there are stairs by the wall, in fact."

If he squinted his eyes to where Beatrice's words had pointed him to, he can just about make out that there's something like steps—— a staircase, on the outer edge of the circular room indeed. However, a huge number of steps formed the spiral staircase that wound its way around the big, circular tower.

Subaru: "Eh…? Does this lead up?"

Beatrice: "Climb them, I suppose. If you do your best, it won't take too long, in fact."

Subaru: "With you telling me to do my best… How many steps are there until the top!?"

Subaru shrieked this out, as it looked likely that he would be made to get some heavy exercise, being made to go up and down all over again. His voice echoed around the tower in vain, most likely it echoed all the way up until to the top before sorrowfully fading away.

Beatrice shrugged her shoulders uttering "Good grief" at Subaru's lament.

Beatrice: “It can’t be helped, I suppose. If we could use something like a bit of magic for this, it may be possible to fly upstairs in some shape or form, but… Well, Subaru, you have no other choice, in fact.”

Subaru: “No, look, we can, like, use Murak here. How about we use something like that to climb all the way up to the very top without stopping with ease?”

Beatrice: “It’s not like we can’t, but there is the feeling we’d be in danger when push comes to shove… such of running out of Mana, in fact.”

Subaru: “Even if we go up the stairs normally, won’t we be running out of steam physically for when push comes to shove!?”

Even though Subaru’s physical strength compared to back when he had been a *hikikomori*[57] was stronger, he was still a feeble boy with quite the ways to go before reaching the standards of strength of this other world, and thus, he could not avoid it.

He didn’t know how high above the Fifth Floor was from the lowermost floor, or rather, the Sixth Floor, but at the very least, he couldn’t even gaze at the ceiling when looking upwards. With how high he thought it was due to that, climbing up would be a deed on the level of mountain climbing.

Subaru: “Damnit! Even so, I have to go up and make sure that the likes of Rem and Patrasche are safe. I have to. Ah, goddamnit.”

Beatrice: “That’s the spirit, I suppose. Good luck, in fact. Betty will cheer you on, I suppose—— it’d be really helpful if you call out to me when you reach the top, in fact.”

Subaru: “A shortcut!? I’m not gonna let you! You come along too with me. Walk! Break into a sweat!”

Beatrice: “Sorry, but Betty is a cute Spirit and sweating would be——”

Subaru steeled his resolve to tackle the stairs, left with no choice, as Beatrice almost dampened his enthusiasm. But, in the middle of their argument, Beatrice suddenly broke off mid-sentence, and looked up overhead.

[57] Meaning NEET, aka shut-ins that never leave their room.

Subaru: “Beako?”

Beatrice: “This is bad, I suppose. Subaru, get down, in fact——!”

With her sudden change in attitude, Subaru’s voice trailed off, as both Beatrice’s expression changed as she leapt, reaching for him. Catching Beatrice by his chest, he lifted her up into his arms.

And, open-mouthed, Beatrice beat at Subaru’s torso.

Beatrice: “Idiot! That doesn’t mean you can pick me up like a baby, I suppose! Get down, in fact!”

Subaru: “It was just on the spur of the moment…”

As he held Beatrice within his arms, Subaru gently leaned his body back. He doesn’t know what’s happening, Beatrice’s alertness was the only thing he had to work from. In preparation for that, he tried to think, but it was too late.

——Immediately afterwards, a terrible sense of pressure emanated from above them, and Subaru held his breath.

The source of that pressure came ever closer with ferocity, and in the next moment something blasted towards Subaru, right in front of his eyes—— a violent quake shook the enormous tower, Subaru was nearly blown away by the shockwave which raised sand and dust up.

He would have probably been thrown about over and over if not for Gian’s enormous frame just behind them. Protected by the weight of the ground dragon and the dragon carriage, Subaru desperately pushed his eyes open in the midst of the sandstorm that was blowing against him.

And then, on the other side of the smoke plume, from the epicenter of the impact the cloud of sand and dust that had risen up abruptly cleared.

Something like a gust of wind tore through the smoke, and soon after, from the other side, the majestic figure of a person could be seen. Tearing through the dense sandy haze which had enveloped them, the person’s figure was turning visible. Subaru’s cheeks stiffened, he was frozen in place.

That figure, their appearance, he recognized it.

Subaru: “You are…?”

A tall woman was walking briskly across the hard floor, stepping ever closer to him.

Her brown, closer to black, hair was tied up into a ponytail; she was marching forward boldly, her limbs, belly and back were exposed by her clothing; it was safe to say that she was half-naked. Her chest and crotch area were just barely covered up, and she donned a black mantle over her outfit. She was a person who wore rather odd clothing.

In Subaru-speak, she looked like a nympho who was donning her mantle over a black bikini top and hot pants.

Long, slender, white arms and legs, along with a bountiful chest that swung about liberally. She was around the same height as Subaru, maybe a little taller. The size of her hips however, could not be compared.

With a handsome face sat on top of her white shoulders, she was quite the looker, with eyes that albeit languid, were rather striking.

——That was definitely the last thing he had laid his eyes upon before losing consciousness.

She was the one who had attacked and slaughtered the Centaur without mercy. And those countless flashes of light that she had launched towards the Centaur were something Subaru knew only too well.

Subaru: “…Are you the Sage?”

???: “_____”

Feeling how parched his throat was, Subaru hoarsely raised this question to the woman who was approaching him in silence.

However, the woman did not deign to answer Subaru until she came right up to where he was stood, and stopped herself in her tracks at a spot where if Subaru were to stretch out his arm, he would be able to touch her. She was just looking at him intently.

Her gaze felt as if she were scrutinizing his entire body, and in honesty, it made Subaru feel quite uneasy.

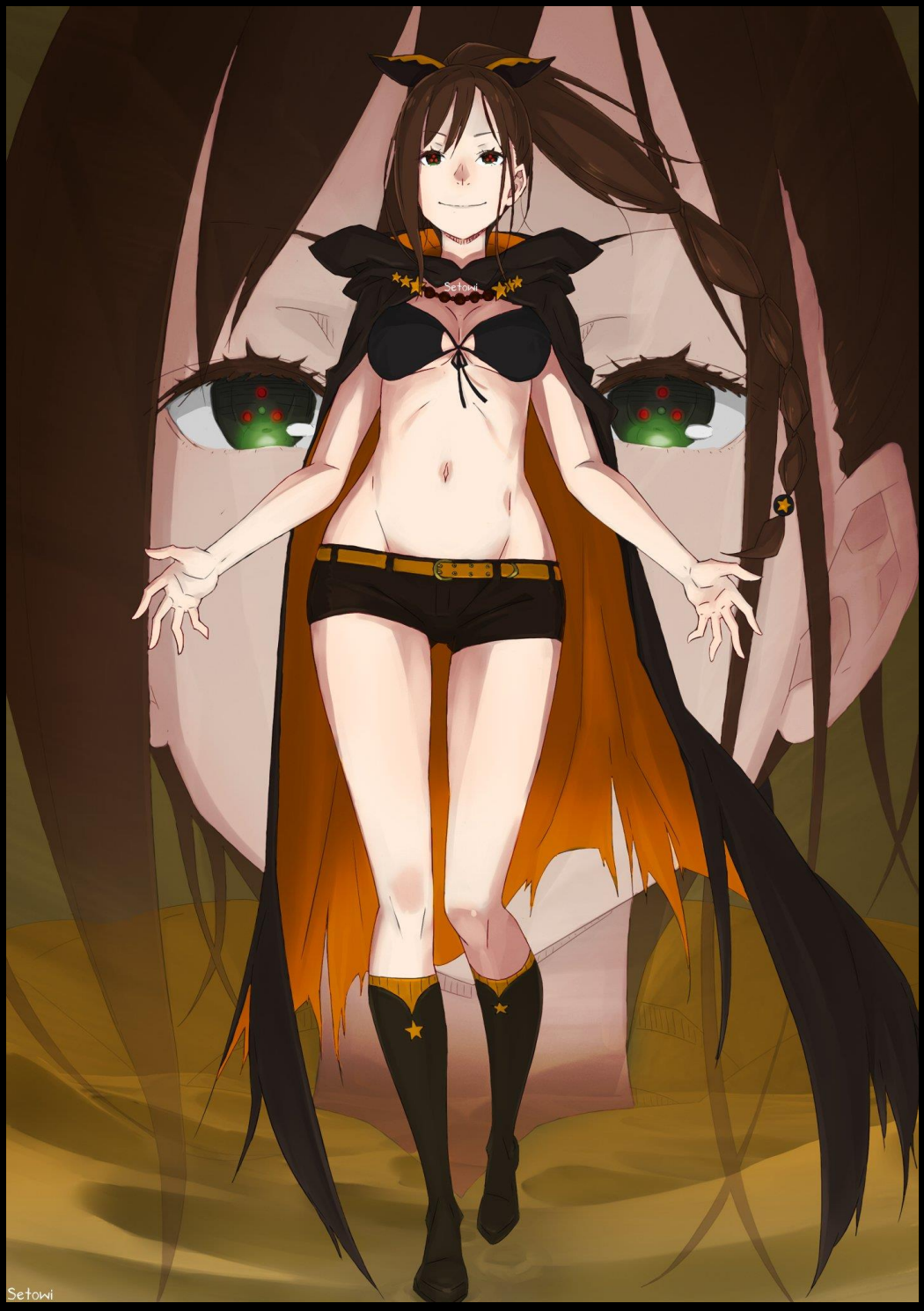

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by Setowi (source)

He had not even heard the voice of this person, but her strength was such that she had made short work in burying the Centaur that had attacked him, putting it at an inhumane level.

One bad move would mean this peculiar person could instantly turn him into nothing more than charcoal. He could not really figure out what her attitude was showing, all he knew was that the only emotion he could feel about her right this instant, was fear.

???: "_____"

In Subaru's arms, Beatrice's body remained unchanging, as she clung onto him tightly. Even in her, anxiety begun seeping throughout her small body.

At least, he was lucky enough for the circumstances to have allowed him to come across Beatrice. In the worst case, it wouldn't be impossible that they would need to get into another fight. Of course, there was no need to come to the point of initiating a fight for the sake of it. He should not be all willy-nilly about such an exertion.

Subaru: "A-Are you… listening? Hey, um, I heard my friends are being looked after, you don't intend to become hostile or stuff to us… right?"

???: "_____"

Subaru: "Um, your silence is making me anxious, if you could say something… Or perhaps, do you communicate with something like telepathy, rather than words? If it's that, that's gonna be a bother! Hahaha."

???: "_____"

Staring at him, the presumed Sage did not reply to Subaru's words, she just continued to stare.

He felt extremely uneasy. The extent to Subaru's bewilderment and confusion could be seen from the confusion in his way of speaking. If things continued in this fashion, they would end up being killed by the uneasiness itself.

——Suddenly though, Subaru's anxiety was torn away.

???: "…Three."

Subaru: “Eh?”

???: “————”

While staring at Subaru, the woman suddenly muttered something as such.

Her voice was a little husky, but if he could continue to listen to it, he could probably say that the huskiness in her voice was quite beautiful. However, it was relatively mysterious, with unreadable emotions coming from the voice of the woman who stood in front of his eyes; he thought there was a faint charm to it.

In front of Subaru, the woman sighed quietly,

???: “Well, that’s no problem. More importantly, I found you.”

Subaru: “Uhh… Eh?”

Swiftly, the woman’s expression changed, and she blurted out something.

Her serious attitude had looked, until then, as if she were trying to peer inside of Subaru, but slowly, and steadily, time passed, as if it something frozen was melting away.

The woman’s lips then spread to the sides, forming a shape which could be called a smile. The woman stared at Subaru and voiced.

???: “——Master.”

Subaru: “…What?”

She uttered a word which he had never heard being said to him before, and emotions which seemed to come out of absolutely nowhere.

Subaru turned to look behind him, in mute astonishment at her unexpected outburst. As expected, there was only Gian’s figure there. Then… was Gian the aforementioned Master?

Subaru: “Did you come here to suddenly setup important character flags!?”

Beatrice: “I don’t think it’s that, I suppose! Look at the facts, in fact!”

Subaru drew nearer to Gian as Beatrice grew angrier, still in his arms.

Even though her words were reasonable, Subaru could not wrap his head around it. Instead, he turned around to face the woman, still standing there as if nothing had happened, without having a clue what had been said,

Subaru: “Wait, no, my bad, but perhaps you’re mistaking me for someone else or something like that… Mmmmph!?”

???: “Master! Jeeeeeeeez! I have beeeen waiting~!”

In the middle of his words, the woman jumped emotionally and embraced him with her arms. Rather than receiving her tackle in full as she came barging in, he was pushed down.

He fell with his back onto the floor, with Beatrice, trapped in between, letting out a shriek sounding like “Mm, kyaaaa”. The woman, bouncing in joy, would not detach herself from Subaru, who was darting his eyes back and forth in confusion.

The woman swished her long ponytail about, and while hugging Subaru with unnatural strength, repeating over and over with delight in her voice,

???: “Master! Master! It’s been so long! I missed you so much! I thought that my life was gonna be just meee shooting those approaching here!”

Subaru: “W-wait! Wait wait! What!? What are you talking about!?”

Shaula: “How crueeel! Master ordered me, no? You told me to stop anyone from getting near to the Shrine… Well, as for the means, well, that’s a different matter, but.”

Subaru: “Not that… I’m your Master…? What are you insinuating!?”

Even though he was in direct contact with a woman’s soft skin, he had no time to enjoy that lucky lewd encounter. Subaru desperately tried to escape from her clutches.

However, there was a saying that said that women would always be women after all, and she did not let go of Subaru. As a result, Beatrice ended up being sandwiched between Subaru and the woman on the floor.

Illustration from Volume 21, coloring by Setowi (source)

Subaru: “Anyways, let go of me, you… This is ridiculous…!”

???: “No way! There’s absolutely no waaay! As soon as you say that, you’ll disappear as soon as I lose sight of you again! Master hasn’t chaaanged at all!”

Subaru: “I don’t know what you’re on about——!!”

The stubborn woman clung to Subaru as if she had gone through some sort of trauma. Whilst he roughly pushed her face away, trying to keep her away, Subaru snapped back at her.

Subaru: “In the first place, who are you?! What’s with all this!”

???: “What are you even saying?! I’m Shaulaaa! The Star-Keeper of the Pleiades Watchtower! I am Master’s cute apprentice, Shaulaaa!”

Subaru: “I don’t remember you what so ever——!”

A woman—— who called herself Shaula, whose name was supposed to be that of the Sage of the tower.

The great so-called Sage of the Pleiades Watchtower could not be such a strange woman who did not know such a thing.

Subaru firmly objected to this idea. However, in this place where there was no such thing as progress, a sudden interruption came about. That was——

???: “——Oh no! Oh no! When I woke up Subaru wasn’t there! I need to hurry and tell everyone, we have to go look for him…”

Subaru: “Ah.”

Having said that, a sleepy-looking Emilia jumped out of the dragon carriage’s door. Exiting the carriage, she found Subaru and Shaula entwined with each other. Of course, Beatrice was there too, her eyes widened as she saw the two.

Subaru: “Emilia… tan! Thank goodness you woke up! This is actually…”

Emilia: “Hiya!”

Subaru: “That hurts!? Emilia-tan, what was that kick for!?”

Emilia: “I really am not sure, but I was reaaally upset there!”

With Emilia awake, the shouting and yelling continued for a while——

The hard struggle against the (assumed) Sage of the Pleiades Watchtower continued, until eventually Julius noticed the noise and joined up with them.

Character Pages for Volume 21

Kawaii*
魔獣
Collection 2
花魁熊
Flower Bear
NNN....
花畑に擬態
(Mimicry to flowers)
ケンタウロス
Centaur
SIDE
砂蚯蚓
Sand Worm
OPEN
CLOSE
SIDE

Web Novel Volume 22

Author Nagatsuki Tappei
Illustrator Otsuka Shinichirou
Translators
Witch Cult Translations
TranslationChicken
Web Novel
Volume
22
Re:ゼロ
Re: Life in a different world from zero
から始める異世界生活

Arc 6 Chapter 19 – The Sage's Whereabouts

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 1 "The Great Pleiades Library", Part 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, Ringo) — Complete

At the unforeseen fight against heavy odds, spread out were the winds of the aftermath of the battle at the Sixth Floor of the Pleiades Watchtower.

An enshrouding cloud of dust, the man and woman grappling with each other were covered in sweat and mud.

And, looking at those two with cold eyes, from every other direction——

Subaru: "What's with that look in your eyes!? You're saying that I've… That I've done something wrong!? I've done nothing wrong, I've done nothing wrong——!!"

Julius: "Subaru, do not try to fool us so much."

Ram: "There are some good sides to him is what Ram thought, but in the end, Barusu is Barusu."

Those were the comments made by the newly-arrived Julius and Ram in regards to Subaru, who had been grabbed by Shaula. Regardless,

Julius: "We were fortunate to be able to reunite safe and sound. It is also good news that you woke up, but… the situation is difficult to comprehend unless you explain it with words."

Subaru: "I would if it was something I could explain… Shit! Let go!"

Shaula: "Nooo~peee~!"

Seeing Shaula clinging to Subaru's arms, Julius, whose hand was at the grip of his sword, shrugged his shoulders. He must have perceived that she didn't have any intentions of attacking them. Even Subaru understood that point, but it was true that he was having a hard time trying to get her away.

Subaru: "Don't just watch, help me get her off…! She has goddamn super-human strength…"

Ram: "Your lips are curving into a smile, Pervusu."

Subaru: "They're not, don't team up with her! Don't take it at face value! Emilia-tan, that hurts! I don't think pulling my hair is gonna be much help!?"

Emilia: "Ah, I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to help you, at all."

Subaru: "You're apologizing for that!?"

The stubborn Shaula did not let go of Subaru's arm, and Emilia, with a somewhat blank expression, continued pulling Subaru's hair. Aside from that, Beatrice, who had gotten trapped between Subaru's and Shaula's jostling, was turning her eyes in all directions, in a state of being crushed, going "Kiyuu".

Anastasia: "What's this… Even after all that trouble, seems it's all been changin' into a pretty good mood."

Meili: "What's onii-san doing just after waking uuup? I don't do well with noisiness, but I'm glaaad onii-san woke up."

Having slowly come down the stairs, Anastasia and Meili had also joined up with them. With this, all except Rem and Patrasche, who were supposed to be undergoing treatment, had gathered here.

It was all well and good that they had been able to reunite, but at this rate they would not be able to calm down and have a proper conversation.

Subaru: "A-ny-way! Everyone, calm down! ——Let's talk!"

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Overworking his throat after just waking up, Subaru managed to get everyone to follow his lead, as he tried to take control of the situation.

With that being said, within the group sitting in a circle, Shaula kept latching onto Subaru's right arm, and on his left was Emilia, sitting *seiza* style[58], at a distance enough to make him shiver. And Beatrice was settled on his lap; it would be an extremely extravagant battle formation in the eyes of an outsider.

Ram: "Repulsive."

Subaru: "Did you even see the disaster a minute ago? Does it look to you that I wanted this to happen to my right side? My bones hurt real bad. At this rate, my arm's gonna become necrotic."

Saying that to Ram, who'd spat those words out, Subaru looked at his constricted right arm.

Being hugged by a half-naked girl, would be a dream-like experience for many, but in reality, rather than experiencing the softness of her skin, the flesh of his arm that was being squeezed and the pain of his joints that went to the limits was having a scary effect on his bones and nerves. Frankly speaking, they could have been torn off.

Subaru: "Well then, before my arm gets torn off from its roots I'd like to proceed with the conversation, but… before that, first of all, everyone, thank goodness you're all alright. Though it's scary that Patrasche and Rem are unconfirmed…"

Beatrice: "You're still being doubtful, I suppose. It's alright, in fact. Everyone is alright, I suppose."

Julius: "It is just as Beatrice-sama says, though your uneasiness and concern are justified. You can properly visit them afterwards—— As you would expect, this time we were all scared to death."

Beatrice and Julius nodded at Subaru, who was delighted at their reunion.

Julius, once again, put on a grim expression on his face, as if reflecting upon the moment straight after they had been separated back at the sand sea,

[58] Literally translated as "proper sitting" (正座), it is the Japanese term for the formal way of sitting in Japan (kneeling with the tops of the feet flat on the floor and sitting on the soles). For more information, see here.

Julius: "Immediately after the space fissured, all of us, except for you, Anastasia-sama and Miss Ram, fell onto the side beyond the flower garden of the Witchbeasts, you see. There, after many twists and turns, we arrived at the Watchtower and were able to get shelter."

Meili: "Buuut, onii-san and the others weren't there, and since we knew they couldn't fight, we were worrieeed."

Julius traced Beatrice's earlier explanation, and Meili agreed as well, pouting.

Their uneasiness was only a matter of course as well. Upon falling into the underground area of the sand sea, Subaru and the rest had disappeared from outside, which had made them worry. Though that went for both sides.

Meili: "Onee-san really lost her composure. We had a tough time when she snapped aaat that Sage-san. Such that, when thinking back to it now, it sends shivers down my spiiine."

Emilia: "Hey, Meili. You don't have to say all that."

At Meili's flirtatious glance unsuitable for her age, Emilia objected, her face going red. Her comments were no exaggeration; that could be easily understood by looking at Emilia, who was blushing all the way up to her ears.

Though imprudent, he was genuinely happy to see her worry for him.

Subaru: "I seeee~ I seeee~, so Emilia-tan was worried. It looks like Beako was worried to the point of crying her eyes out as well, I'm such a lucky guy."

Emilia: "Geez, Subaru, joking about again like that… Also, Beatrice wouldn't have cried her eyes out. Just around half of that. Yeah, that's right."

Beatrice: "If you want to look out for others then do it properly until the very end, in fact, you natural airhead…!"

Emilia: "——?"

With the truth that she'd been driven to tears exposed, Beatrice pouted while Emilia remained clueless. Loosening his cheeks at that pleasant exchange, Subaru looked up at Julius.

Subaru: "If that's so, then you must have gotten pretty worried too, right? It's unfortunate I couldn't see that expression of yours."

Julius: "Of course, I was greatly agitated. Regardless of you, because of Anastasia-sama and Miss Ram. It would be regretful to lose the two frail ladies somewhere beyond reach. Without showing you all my form of having a pale face and walking about in worry, currently I am only experiencing relief in my fragile spirit."

Subaru: "Why'd you make a conversation about you getting scared so graceful?"

Subaru twisted his lips at Julius, who was touching his bangs as if out of habit, with a bittersweet smile on his face.

Without him putting up a strong front, and without even showing a weak side of his, it was an absolutely boring result. With that, Meili started laughing lightly at the exchange of the two.

When they questioned her by merely gesturing through their eyes, she placed her braided hair against her mouth, and,

Meili: "Oh it's nothiiing."

And, she deceived them with a smile which seemingly held deep meaning.

Subaru: "Well, from this I get that everyone who got separated was worried for us. Nobody is missing in the end, so it's something which we can look back on and smile now."

Ram: "Only Barusu can be so boldly shameless. Even now, Ram's petite figure and soft heart is about to break apart with uneasiness and fear just by thinking about it."

Subaru: "Is the nee-sama who, among all the people I know, the one which seems to have the toughest heart, saying something?"

In truth, amongst all of Subaru's acquaintances, Ram was the one who wielded the utmost mental strength. Her remarks seemed to be a silly joke as if a matter of course, but he ended up intently looking at Ram's face, who was sitting right in front of him.

White skin with light-crimson eyes. And of course, well-ordered facial features, along with refreshing beauty. Beautiful facial features like a suspicious berry found in the valley of sweetness and elegance. No matter how he looked at her, she was the same Ram as always.

Ram: "——Put an end to that unpleasant gaze. Looking so intently, what do you want?"

Subaru: "Well, I was just thinking that you're really Ram."

Ram: "This is totally hopeless now, isn't it?"

Subaru: "Stop making judgements without any proper subjects! Not that, I mean…"

Subaru replied in a flummoxed manner back at Ram who'd cut off and cast aside Subaru's words.

The incident that had occurred just before he had lost his consciousness in the underground area came up in his mind—— Ram had protected Subaru with her injured body, by standing in front of the Centaur.

Her delicate figure seen from the back, which had been peppered with wounds, had faced that formidable enemy without any prospects of victory. Back then, he had felt the terror of losing her, seeing her figure that showed no fear of being wounded; and now, both of them had made it back alive safely.

He had realized that fact by talking with the usually fearless her.

Subaru: "Sure enough, there's still this sense of distance between us. It did get strangely loathsome and worse, but when I think back on it, that too was… No, that still shouldn't be a good memory to reflect back on."

Ram: "I do not understand what you are trying to grumble out. Spit it all out. Like a man."

Subaru: "I'm glad we're both safe, is what I mean. Plus, I'm also glad you protected and saved me at the end there."

Ram: "…That was a waste of time."

Subaru: "How can you say that!?"

Even though he had honestly expressed his gratitude, it meant absolutely zilch to her.

Following that, Emilia let out a stifled giggle seeing Subaru get miffed like that.

Emilia: "It's okay, Subaru. It's just because Ram's a little embarrassed."

Subaru: "Nee-sama's embarassed…? Wouldn't the heavens and earth switching places be more believable?"

Emilia: "N-not really. Perhaps it's because you kept hugging Ram until she woke up, so she's kinda embarrassed. Even when separated, it was rough."

Ram: "Emilia-sama!"

Emilia secretly whispered that into his ear, but Ram reacted angrily to her words. She raised her eyes unusually in anger as if she'd read Emilia's lips or something,

Ram: "I think it would be better that you do not judge things using your own criteria. Because I do not think I want to work for a dunderhead who does not understand people's feelings."

Emilia: "…When you say «dunderhead», you aren't referring to me, right?"

Ram: "I am not. Emilia-sama, you do properly think about people's feelings, if there is anyone who has got nothing to do with being a dunderhead, it would be you; it would be so ridiculous of me to say otherwise."

Emilia: "I see. Erm, wait up, let me think for a bit."

Emilia began to brood in earnest thought at what Ram had said, whose words had been plastered with great sarcasm. Meanwhile, Ram glared at Subaru with a glint in her eye as sharp as a blade, and then stirred her lips into speech, saying, "Forget this".

Subaru reflexively nodded at her threatening attitude. When he had woken up, he remembered that there had been the traces of someone who had been lying on the bed together with him. He had thought for sure it had been Beatrice, but it seemed like, according to what she had said now, it——

Subaru: "Uh-oh, I've forgotten it, I've forgotten it. I said I've forgotten it."

Ram: "Good. You are not a dunderhead… Emilia-sama. Let us leave it at that."

Emilia: "Ergh, has it come to Ram gradually becoming more outspoken about me…?"

Emilia looked at her with reproach, but Ram turned her aside with a look of feigned ignorance.

In any case, Subaru turned his eyes away from Ram, who seemed like she did not wish to touch on this subject anymore, and looked towards the last of his companions, at Anastasia.

She sat beside Julius, fiddling with her pompons that adorned her hat as usual. But, upon noticing Subaru's gaze, she gave him a graceful smile.

Anastasia: "Ahh, so you're done talkin'? Natsuki-kun, I thought you'd forgotten 'bout me."

Subaru: "I hope you can forgive me for my ego in prioritizing my own. I'm glad that you're safe too. Speaking of the last battle in the underground area, I haven't got a clue about what happened after."

Anastasia: "Are ya goin' to make me remember those scary thoughts, where I too was thrown down into that pitch-black darkness? Natsuki-kun 'n Ram-san, 'n… Ah, 'n Patrasche-chan were fightin' their damnedest, so the Witchbeast was ignorin' me. I wasn't of any use there, but I was goin' to be of use for the negotiations."

Subaru: "Negotiations?"

Anastasia: "With the Sage-san who helped us, ya know."

Anastasia pointed at Shaula, who was still nestling her face against Subaru's right arm.

When he heard about negotiations with this, Subaru frowned, but Anastasia gave him a wry smile.

Anastasia: "Ah, nono, we're also quite confused. 'Cause, she wouldn't answer anythin' 'til only a few minutes ago, regardless of me pushin' 'n pullin' her, but with'cha, Natsuki-kun, she's madly in love."

Subaru: "She wouldn't speak to you? This thing?"

Shaula: "It's not this thing, it's Shaula. Master~."

Subaru: "Shut up…"

Subaru responded dejectedly at Shaula getting miffed, and Anastasia shrugged her shoulders.

Certainly, looking only at the situation, she had barely said a single word to Anastasia and the rest. However, she'd been nattering away at Subaru. So, in reality, just about everything of this situation was unexpected.

Subaru: "When someone suddenly nestles over to you with one-hundred Favorability, even if they happen to be a beautiful woman, this one's Favorability is zero, so it isn't something worth me getting perplexed over…"

Shaula: "——! Just now, did you say that I'm a beautiful woman!?"

Subaru: "You sure have sharp ears when it suits you, HEY!"

Once again, Subaru tried to push Shaula's head off with his empty left hand. However, the more he struggled to do that, the more Shaula's strength increased, eventually leading Subaru to give in.

In the end, the out of breath Subaru shook his head, saying "It can't be helped", with Shaula still clinging to his right arm.

Subaru: "For now, let's put off all these trivial matters and talk about what should be talked about. I don't want us to keep going around and around in circles with a lack of explanation. I want you to tell us about various things."

Shaula: "Suuuuuure~ thing, if it's something Master has to say, then let's hop to it!"

Julius: "Indeed, your collaboration is a great help. So, I wish to ask about this. You are the Sage who retired to this Pleiades Watchtower… Is my understanding correct?"

Shaula: "**Turning away SFX**"

Subaru: "Answer him! Didn't you just say you'd talk!"

Quite in contrast to her friendly smile, Shaula turned her face away sharply from Julius's question. Straight after Subaru got pissed off at her poor attitude, Shaula turned her pouting face towards him.

Shaula: "Mymy, what happened Master? Master, didn't you hammer into me not to tell, speak or say anything unnecessary to anyone, no matter what they ask? I'm just loyally abiding by what you told meeeee~. I can't believe you're angry! I'm gonna file a case against you!"

Subaru: "Your Master is absolutely awful!"

Shaula: "Yeah, yeah. Master's suuuuch~ an awful person. I should demand an apology from him, and for him to deeply reflect on himself."

Subaru: "So, calling people Master as you please is just… Huh, Emilia-tan, what's with those eyes?"

Emilia had narrowed her round eyes at Subaru and Shaula's strange spiel. Subaru braced himself in case it was another inexplicable outburst, but Emilia continued by saying, "Well",

Emilia: "It may not really be a big deal, but… How can I explain it? Isn't the way you both talk quite similar?"

Subaru: "Does it look like I'm talking with such a chavish tone!?"

Emilia: "That's not what I mean, the expressions you both use is what I meant. You see, you always joke about even during serious conversations, right? That's the feeling I'm getting."

Subaru: "You think of me like that!?"

Subaru was horrified by that completely unexpected evaluation of hers, but Emilia paid him no heed. On the contrary,

Julius: "Hmmm… Surely, now that you mention it."

Ram: "Barusu's typical conversational ability? There's trouble lying in wait ahead, then."

Meili: "But I really liiike Onii-san's way of talking?"

Anastasia: "Though, everyone's got some manner that sits heavy on yer stomach, don't'cha think?"

Subaru's mouth gaped wide open as everyone appended their own evaluations on top of each other. However, a little girl furiously lost her temper in Subaru's stead—— And that girl was Beatrice.

Beatrice: "Really, don't go saying just whatever you feel like, I suppose. Not only are you acting way too familiar with Subaru, you're also acting far too clingy ever since a while ago, in fact. How hard you think this is for Betty, despite taking Subaru's hand, I suppose! It's unfair, in fact!"

The topic had changed quite a bit midway, but Beatrice's had a gleeful disposition to her. However, Shaula turned Beatrice's protests aside, with a look on her face that a beautiful girl should not be making.

Beatrice's already lacking amount of patience reached its limit when she saw Shaula's complete lack of concern completely expressed on her face.

However, before that, Subaru's karate chop hit Shaula square on her forehead.

Subaru: "That's enough!"

Shaula: "Ow… Though it doesn't actually hurt, isn't that abuse!? It is abuse…! Master used violence against meeeee~! I'll be seeing you in court!"

Subaru: "Pipe down! You can speak with other people properly from now on! Or this talk will go nowhere!"

Shaula: "…Would that be okay?"

Subaru: "Yes it would! Rather, I recommend it! It's high time you start speaking seriously!"

Shaula's face turned to one of complete surprise towards the frowning Subaru's complaints. And then, little-by-little, her facial expression changed, first surprise, then comprehension, then assent, and finally deep gratitude. Then, she said,

Shaula: "Yippeeeeee! Yaaaaay~! I got permission to taaalk! Now I don't have to play the act of the deeply mysterious femme fatal anymore~! Hip, hip, hoooooray!"

Subaru: "Now not even a fragment of that factor is left behind!!"

Her face was lit up in a deep smile; if she had a tail, she'd probably be wagging it around in full swing.

Though as a matter of fact, Shaula's ponytail was swinging about in delight as she still held on tightly onto his arm, with her ponytail smacking against his forehead, his cheeks, and god knew what else repeatedly.

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Subaru: "——So, it's okay to say that you're the Sage from the rumours, right?"

The racket had died down for a bit, and finally, they'd truly reached the discourse that they should have undertaken before said racket.

Shaula, who had let go of Subaru's right arm, was sitting cross-legged in the middle of the group, now sat in a circle, surrounding her. Incidentally, his right arm had become numb, and he couldn't raise it. Nor would it move.

Shaula: "————"

Subaru: "Answer me. You're the Sage, right?"

Shaula: "Hmm~, the answer to that question is difficult."

Having been greeted with silence to his question, Subaru had once again repeated the same query. Following that, Shaula replied vaguely, putting on a sour expression as if she'd ate a pickled plum.

Subaru frowned on receiving that answer, revealing his bewilderment. However, it was Emilia who raised her hand, in place of him. She spoke out, prefacing her words with "In which case".

Emilia: "Setting aside whether you're the Sage… The one they say guarded the Sand Dunes all this time from inside this Tower would be you, right?"

Shaula: "Ah, that's meeeee~ for sure. For four-hundred years, every single day forever and eeeever~ guarding the midst of this sand, and each barren day I've spent would be something that would make both the one reciting it, and the one hearing it cry…!"

Emilia: "Poor thing… Hk."

Subaru: "Emilia-tan, don't get affected by it. And you as well, don't go exchanging unnecessary feelings."

The empathetic Emilia's eyes teared over at Shaula who gave her response as she shook her fist. As he calmed Emilia down, Subaru, based off Shaula's current answer, crossed gazes with Julius.

Julius gave a nod at that exchange of looks, and took charge of the conversation, speaking out a "So,".

Julius: "Would I be right in recognizing you as having borne the burden of working as a Sage for four-hundred years, as is typically well-known? Shaula-sama."

Shaula: "You're making me blush, attaching stuff like "sama[59]". I'm not used to it, so you can address me without using any honorifics like normal. Using Shaula-sama… Dhehehe."

Julius: "Then, I shall correct myself—— Surely the one that is typically known as the Sage is you? Shaula."

Shaula: "Weeell~, I'm not so sure about that? Even if that's what's typically said, I don't ever leave the Tower, so I don't know anything about rumors from the outside. It feels unexpectedly strange, doesn't it? Like I'mmmmm~ being called a Sage."

Shaula's facial expression, which had been completely at ease, completely changed to one tinged in thoughtfulness, and the atmosphere did too. Julius also narrowed his eyes, facing the depth of her gaze which seemed like it was searching for something.

Her current remark was not the kind which could be ignored, even by those other than Julius. Because, if Shaula's words were the truth——

Julius: "If you are not the Sage, then it would turn out that the legend of Sage Shaula is a completely incorrect rumor. Or, is it saying that there's a Shaula other than you, who is considered to be a Sage?"

Shaula: "The Sage Shaula from those rumors is someone I'm not aware of, buuuuut~, as far as I know, there's no acquaintance of mine named Shaula other than meeeeee. I was given this name from Master as well, so Master must've given it just to me… Buuut~."

Shaula's gaze had fleetingly turned towards Subaru, but Subaru had never named anyone Shaula in the first place, nothing nor nobody.

However, it was a fact that there was a certain ring to the name "Shaula". Shaula too was the name of a star, it was the star name that formed Scorpius—— and its meaning was "the Stinger".

[59] The honorific "様" conveys respect, meaning that the person is regarding as being of higher status.

Naturally, his thoughts extended to the true identity of the white rays of light which had been fired from the Watchtower, however, when it came to getting that information out of her, he wouldn't mind postponing it until later. Right now, what had to take priority was a different issue.

Shaula: "Since Master seems like he has no clue, Shaula is just myyyyyy~ name of course. Master gave that name just to meeeee~… There's no need for any other Shaulas."

Julius: "I see. You seem to be really fond of that Master—— Must have been a sinful guy, huh."

Subaru: "Quit looking at me when saying that. Those are false accusations. Innocence presumed."

Ram: "Guilty as proven… That is what Ram thinks."

Subaru: "Don't you take pride in being a lawful nation!?"

Setting aside the interruption, he could not catch any glimpses of there being a lie in what Shaula was saying. If that was the case, then was she different to the one from the legends?

Suddenly, Anastasia started to rummage through her chest pocket, without any consideration for the individuals conversing with each other. Then, lo' and behold, she pulled some coins out from her purse for some reason.

Subaru: "Don't tell me… you're suddenly counting your money?"

Anastasia: "Even though it's my hobby, 'n feelin' my change makes me work better when I'm deep in thought… That ain't my intention. Here ya go, you'll get what I mean when ya look at the coins of the Kingdom properly."

Saying that, Anastasia tossed the coins on her palm over at the befuddled Subaru. He hurriedly caught them; what she'd flung his way were four coins: a copper coin, a silver coin, a gold coin and a holy gold coin.

There was probably no way that it could be something like a bribe for Shaula, or an alternative of a tip. Making sure to check the coins as she had told him to, Subaru noticed the designs engraved into them.

He really had not taken a good look at their money up until now, but——

Subaru: "So it's common just about everywhere to engrave pictures and designs and stuff on money. How strange."

Anastasia: "I don't see what's strange 'bout it? We've gotta know from where the money comes from… Besides, it's 'cause money always comes with the history of its country. That's why stuff that's intrinsic to the country's history's engraved on it."

Subaru: "Hmmmm…?"

Subaru turned his attention to the engravings on the coins whilst he listened to Anastasia's explanation. And upon looking closely… yes, the coins each had different engraved designs——

Emilia: "Holy gold coins have the Divine Dragon, gold coins have the First Generation Sword Saint, silver coins have the Sage, and the copper coins have Lugunica's Royal Castle on them. Didn't you know?"

Subaru: "E-Emilia-tan is speaking like a super-learned character with what she's saying…!"

Emilia: "Or more so, it's obvious stuff I'd say. Were you so unaware when shopping that you never looked at the money properly?"

Subaru whistled innocently, covering his tracks, at Emilia's painful inquiry. And as he did that, he checked, afterwards seeing that the engravings on the money were exactly as she had seemed to explain them.

A Dragon was engraved on the holy gold coin, a man with a sharp look was engraved on the gold coin, the Royal Castle was engraved on the copper coin, and finally, engraved on the silver coin was a——

Subaru: "A young, handsome onii-san, I guess. Doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to Shaula."

Beatrice: "But, the guy on this drawing is what appears as Shaula to the world, in fact."

A handsome man with long hair, and intrepid features was carved there on the coin. Naturally, even if he were to try and change the angle of it, it seemed unlikely that they'd be mistaken as a half-naked hottie of a woman.

Shaula herself was pestering him with a "Lemme see!", so he handed the coin over to her. When he did so, she gazed at the silver coin up close, and spoke,

Shaula: "Ehhh, rather well-made huh? It looks exactly like Master."

Subaru: "Where are you seeing that!? Ah, no, if the Sage that's engraved there is your Master, then what do you mean by me resembling the Master inside your memories?"

Shaula: "Geez, what are you talking about? Myyyy~ Master is the only Master."

Subaru: "So, let me restate myself once again. WHERE ARE YOU SEEING THAT!?"

He cleared his throat, and shouted at the top of his lungs at Shaula, who was comparing him with the design etched upon the silver coin.

Even if they differed in hairdo, their expression and, in the first place, even their race seemed to be different[60]. The thing they matched in was their gender it seemed. Were he to judge it only by the category of having a good-looking face, then Julius would be much closer to it than Subaru was?

However, Shaula looked at him with dissatisfaction, going "Ehhhhh" at Subaru's opinion.

Shaula: "Looks fairly accurate from what I can seeeee~. You have hair, two eyes, two ears, and a nose and mouth."

Subaru: "That sort of level!? Aren't you complimenting it like a preschooler's portrait!?"

Emilia: "I guess that I too still don't think that Subaru and this Sage resemble each other…"

Though Shaula had grown sulky, Subaru's verdict, and of course, Emilia's outed it. Their verdicts were reasonable. However, Shaula still didn't look convinced,

Shaula: "It's because I'mmmm~ not very good at comparing people's faces. Men and women are just about different, but stuff other than that is about the same… After that, it'd come down to size, wouldn't it?"

Beatrice: "She looked at Betty right now and came out with that, I suppose, this woman."

[60] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "I know a lot of you will see the word race and think. Huh, Flugel may not be human? Deep lore? Well, let me clarify that race here is simple, as in Asian, Black, White, etc."

Subaru: "It's okay, since Beako being cute and small is unique. Putting that aside, you have such a sense of telling beauty and yet you call me, out of all people, your Master. You're mistaking me completely for someone else!"

Taking advantage of Shaula's excuse, Subaru shook off some of the dishonor he had accrued so far from the false accusations. It had been a ridiculous suggestion in the first place. Of course, he didn't even need to consider it, Subaru had nothing in common with Shaula, and that was a relief.

Or so he thought, but Shaula shook her head at that, and said,

Shaula: "Ah. Meeee~ having found Master wasn't a question about appearance, so there's no issue with that."

Subaru: "Not about appearance, you say, then how did you find out? By aura?"

Shaula: "Smell."

Subaru: "————"

Shaula: "Well no, I mean, I can't think of anyone except Master who'd let such a dark, pungent smell, to the point that my nose seems to scrunch up, hang off from them."

Subaru: "Honestly, that the first time I've had my feelings hurt like that! What, am I that bad!?"

When that keyword "smell" came out, Subaru had readied himself up for just a moment. However, his readiness was shattered in one blow by Shaula's choice of words straight after.

Shaula had a mystified look to her set towards Subaru, whose face had turned red at her unexpected evaluation.

Shaula: "Why did you get mad? Ah, is it because I said «pungent»? It's fine! Master's smell is really bad, but it's the type of smell I wanna keep smelling and smelling! It's that of the unusual cooking variety, not the sort that makes you spew, so it's cool!"

Subaru: "Girls don't say «spew» and «it's cool» together! You didn't need to follow it up after that!"

Subaru covered his face with his palm, about to break down crying on the spot, feeling rather ashamed.

Subaru: "Ughh… I thought I'd just about gotten used to people saying that, but being humiliated like this is far too much. What did I ever do to you…"

Emilia: "I-it's okay, Subaru. I perfectly understand. So, shall we bathe properly afterwards?"

Subaru: "Perfectly understand it my ass!"

The anguished, dented Subaru had become useless. Beatrice let out a sigh as she looked at Emilia consoling him from the side. And then, she grabbed ahold of Subaru's underarm, and leaned her weight on his back,

Beatrice: "I understand the reason why you mistook Subaru as a complete stranger, I suppose."

Shaula: "I haven't mistaken him. You sure are impertinent for a lil' ankle-biter, aren't'cha?"

Beatrice: "Sorry, but that lil' ankle-biter is your precious Master's *aikata*[61], in fact. Oops, you mistook him for someone else, so he isn't actually your master or anything, I suppose. Pardon me, in fact."

Shaula: "————"

Beatrice: "————"

Silently, sparks from their gazes flew up between Beatrice and Shaula.

The subject of their talk had ended up completely scattered all over the place, but even if they tried to get it back on track, the people there who would put the conversation back on course were too few. Given the situation, the face of common sense would get the short end of that stick.

Ram: "Beatrice-sama, let's leave the strife until after we are done. After our important discussion, you will be free to decide who owns Barusu."

Beatrice: "Subaru isn't owned by anyone, I suppose. That is the point, in fact."

Ram: "…Yeah, yeah."

[61] Engrish flip. Means "partner (who shares one's load)" (相肩), originally "パートナー" (partner). The word chosen isn't the best here, but given Subaru and Beatrice's deep relationship, it feels fitting.

Ram let herself take in Beatrice's anger whilst her eyes filled with shock. And after she replied, Ram narrowed her eyes and called out to Shaula, who was still looking at Beatrice with a thorny look in her eyes.

Ram: "In any case, if you could speak to us, then that would be a godsend. Up until now, you could not go along with having a serious conversation with us, but don't you think now would be okay to do so?"

Shaula: "Mhm, I have Master's permission, so that would be *yoshi*[62]. Saying that though, even I aaaam~ not so nice as to answer absolutely everything. Or rather, I should say I don't know that much stuff."

Ram: "Merely that answer makes it clear to me that you being called the Sage is a mistake."

Proudly puffing out her ample chest, Shaula unabashedly declared her ignorance all the more. Ram puffed out her small chest as if she were rivalling Shaula's. She snorted her nose showing an air of superiority more than anyone else here.

Ram: "You are Shaula, but not the Sage. Then, I wonder, do «Sword Saint» and «Divine Dragon» ring a bell?"

Shaula: "Sword Saiiin'~ and Divine Draaagon~?"

Ram: "Their names are Reid and Volcanica."

Shaula: "Ewwwww!"

Shaula stuck her tongue out at Ram's question, her face looking like she'd chewed something sour.

It was easy enough to understand from her response that both those names were familiar. When Ram silently urged that knowledge out of her, Shaula rocked her body from left to right, still sat cross-legged, and said,

Shaula: "I know them. The Stick Swinger Reid, and the Cynic Volcanica are old friends of mine. I haven't at all seen them since we parted, but they must be doing great, right?"

[62] Engrish flip. Means "alright" (よし), originally "OK". Yes, Shaula uses Engrish here and there.

Ram: "One of them… Reid is dead, since a long time ago."

Shaula: "Seriously!? He's dead, even though he was a guy who was nigh-unkillable!? How did he die!? Did he eat something strange!?"

Ram: "His lifespan. No one can go against the decree of the heavens above."

Shaula: "Lifespan… Ah, I see. That's right. Reid was a human being, wasn't he?"

Having been told about the death of her acquaintance, Shaula had cast her eyes down with a solemn attitude to her. She seemed somewhat sad, having dropped her shoulders, drooping down in dejection all over all the way to her ponytail.

Regardless of what she had been saying and behaving up until now, her figure mourning her friend's death was neutrally, a sad thing.

Whilst he finally regained his footing, Subaru too felt something panging inside his chest when he looked at Shaula's face from the side.

Shaula: "So, Volcanica is doing well?"

Subaru: "Because they're a Dragon."

Shaula: "Ahh, a Dragon, huh. Though, it would have been better if Volcanica had died rather than Reid~."

Subaru: "Those words seem to be way too much, hey."

Having shown only a mere touch of sadness, Shaula quickly went back to herself. Her face had gone clear, as she bitterly spoke about her other acquaintance.

To that, Ram closed one of her eyes in thought, and said,

Ram: "You remember Reid and Volcanica… In that case, you should know your Master's name, right?"

Shaula: "————"

Subaru and the others all held their breaths on hearing Ram's question. Only the questioned Shaula's face remained blank, replying with an "Obviously".

Ram's question was indeed quite effective at unravelling the mystery of the Sage .

The "Sage = Shaula" system had collapsed now, so if there was someone who had accomplished the deeds required to be called a Sage other than her, naturally, they would need to meet that individual.

Shaula had mistaken Subaru as that individual for some reason, but a name probably was not something which could be falsified. Subaru prayed for a miracle where a Sage bearing the name of Natsuki Subaru would not come out of her here.

And, his prayer would be fulfilled—— In a strange way which he could not possibly have imagined.

Shaula: "It's weird that Master's name is on your mind. Considering he's right there, and though all of you are Master's companions, you don't know it?"

Ram: "I apologize, but your Master hit his head on the toilet bowl and forgot a bunch of stuff."

Subaru: "Is there a meaning behind having restricted it to toilets?"

Shaula: "Master, you did it again…?"

Subaru: "Again!?"

With Shaula looking at him sympathetically, Subaru tasted humiliation which he shouldn't have received. However, she hopped up as if she had understood that reply, and said,

Shaula: "Then you'll hear it from meeeee~. Master's name… That's right, even that name is that of the famed Great Sage. Certainly, being called something like a Sage is only befitting of Master!"

Subaru: "Get to the point!"

Shaula: "You're so impatient~. But, that too is like Master."

Shaula gave off a gaudy gesture which contained irritation, but she stuck her tongue out with a pouty face at Subaru's demand. And then, she placed her finger on her cheek, and said with an awfully childish gesture,

Shaula: "Flugel."

Subaru: "…Huh?"

Shaula: "Master's name is Flugel. The Great Sage Flugel, Shaula's Master[63]."

Shaula's whole face lit up into a smile and she delightfully puffed out her chest the moment she spoke those words.

There was no shadow of a doubt that Shaula was putting deep love, gratitude and pure respect into that, and held reverence and affection towards Flugel.

However, Subaru and the others' reactions varied in respect to that name.

At any rate, he knew that name.

Subaru: "…Isn't that the name of the person who planted the tree?"

Saying that, Subaru craned his neck at hearing the name of that historical figure whose fates had crossed only once before.

[63] Now, this was originally translated as "Great Erudite" by Witch Cult Translations, but upon consulting Ice, it was decided that this may be rolled back into Sage. The reason boils down to consistency: in ReZero, you will find two different expressions that have been translated to Sage, "賢人" and "賢者". The meaning is essentially the same, but what's interesting is that some very significant characters in the lore prefer the former to the latter when talking about Sagedom: Echidna, Roswaal, and now Shaula. Ideally, I'd go back and review every entry of "賢者" as "Sage", and "賢人" as "Erudite". But that would create a LOT of confusion at times in discussion, so it's preferrable to conflate both Japanese words into the same translation, and leave you with this translation note, because there might be meaning in the differentiation. As note, the expression "賢人" here used for Flugel is also used as for what is translated as "Council of Sages", "Council of Wise Men" or "Council of Elders" (賢人会). However, to create a distinction and to prevent confusion (for now), the choice of translation for that body is "Council of Wise Men".

Arc 6 Chapter 20 – Shaula ≠ Sage = Flugel

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 1 “The Great Pleiades Library”, Part 3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——The eminent Great Sage Flugel.

As soon as Shaula had mentioned his name with a proud puff of her ample chest as she gave them an open-looking smile, Subaru and the others had exchanged looks with each other, wrapped up by an uncomfortable feeling in the air.

Shaula: “Huh? What’s up with that response? Did I say something weeeeird~?”

Subaru: “No, it’s because, what the?”

Shaula widened her eyes blankly on hearing Subaru and the others’ dismal response. He felt bad for her, who was the very picture of confidence, as if to say that there was nothing mysterious to her words. However, the emotions that Subaru and the others harbored towards the name of that “Flugel” were rather complex.

The Great Sage Flugel.

Though the title she’d given him was unfortunately different, Subaru was familiar with that name.

It was the name of an individual with whom he had crossed fates with just once ever since he had been summoned into this different world. However, he did not have any acquaintanceship with that individual, only a one-sided Debt.

In any case, the reason he knew his name was down to the fact that he’d had an experience in which his life had been saved thanks to that individual’s deed.

Subaru: “Flugel’s Great Tree… That Flugel-san, right?”

Everyone except Shaula gave a curt nod at the keyword that slipped out from Subaru’s mouth. Although, Meili inclined her head in doubt as if she didn’t know, saying “Whaaat’s that?”.

Meili: “I’ve never heaaard that term before. «Great Tree», does it just mean tree[64]?”

Subaru: “Yeah. Right, there’s a damn huge tree that grew on the Lifaus Plains in the Kingdom of Lugunica, and it’s called Flugel’s Great Tree. It’s so huge that it’s said that it may have almost reached past the clouds; it was something that could really tickle at your male instincts.”

Meili: “Ehhh, I seee. When you say it like that, I’d very much liiike to see it.”

Subaru: “Sorry. About that, I cut it down.”

Meili: “Onii-san’s so mean!”

He’d ended up swiftly shattering Meili’s wish, and as a result, treated as something less than human.

Strictly speaking, cutting down the tree had not been Subaru’s responsibility. However, it had been Subaru who had proposed cutting it down and using it, so when it came to talking about who was the most responsible, Subaru was the one.

——Flugel’s Great Tree had ended up being his trump card a year ago during the Battle to Subjugate the White Whale.

The Great Tree’s existence had been cardinally important in subjugating the Witchbeast of Fog, the White Whale, considering that the tree was larger in size than that colossal beast. In the end, he could say that they’d cut down the Great Tree, pinned the White Whale underneath it so it was rendered unable to move, and finally delivered a finishing blow onto it.

[64] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “Right, «フリュ―ゲルの大樹» is of course «Flugel’s Tree» or, more accurately, «Flugel’s Great Tree» when translated in English in the Anime/other translations. But because of Meili’s confusion, this passage may not make complete sense. To explain, Meili doesn’t understand the term «大樹», and because of the Anime/other translations always using «tree» I can’t really just change it to Subaru saying it in Latin, or something. So, when reading that passage keep in mind that it’s like as if Subaru is using a very fancy word Japanese that your average young person wouldn’t understand. Also, a very interesting point about that word, which is read as: «タイジュ», is that it shares a homophone with the word «大儒» which means «Great Scholar/Erudite». I think this double meaning is important.”

Subaru: “I do feel bad for Flugel-san, who they say planted it, but… In no shape or form did I ever think I’d hear his name in a place like this.”

Emilia: “The stump where the negotiations that followed the subjugation of the White Whale took place, the spot from which it can be seen, right? I’ve heard that they used the chopped tree for various stuff, though…”

Julius: “At the present, only the stump has been left there, known as the Vestiges of Flugel’s Great Tree. It remains in a status-quo where it is protected as an important historical landmark, but after several hundreds of years, it ought to go back to how it was before, one should think.”

Emilia and Julius replied about what had happened after following Subaru’s wonderment.

Straight after the subjugation of the White Whale, they had subjugated Sloth as well, and the attack of the Sin Archbishops involving Crusch and Rem had overlapped with that. And to make matters worse, straight after he had joined back up with the Emilia Camp, there had been that commotion surrounding the Sanctuary, where they had ended up in. However, after all these unfortunate series of events, the negotiations of the spoils of war had taken place.

There, a discussion regarding the great deeds against the White Whale and Sloth had been the *pièce de résistance*, but naturally they had also ended up discussing compensation for the damage they had incurred. One of the matters they’d discussed was Flugel’s Great Tree, namely taking care of the remaining stump and effective uses of the felled tree itself.

Incidentally, they had deemed the White Whale as having no practical use, so its huge carcass had been cleaved up by a bunch of people and incinerated. Only its skull had been presented to the Royal Castle as evidence of its subjugation.

In any case, setting aside the Great Tree’s treatment, and moving back to the more crucial Flugel-san.

Subaru: “Come to think on it, I’ve definitely heard him referred to as Sage Flugel.”

Beatrice: “But, he’s a Sage who no one really knows what he’s done, in fact… So, to begin with, it’s strange that he’s being treated as a Sage, I suppose.”

Ram: “When you consider his achievements alone, it is true that his accomplishments pale in comparison to the title of Sage. Perhaps he liked to toot his horn too much on his achievements… A guy just like Barusu, eh?”

Subaru: “When have I ever exaggerated my achievements!?”

Subaru grew rather sullen at having received that unexpected evaluation. However, Ram’s faced remained nonchalant.

And whilst listening to that exchange, Anastasia spoke out with an “I see”. She was the only one whose face showed some understanding,

Anastasia: “Certainly, from what the story that circulates ‘round says, Flugel-san may be lackin’ for someone bein’ called a Sage, but… I wonder if things ended up bein’ like what I suspect now that Shaula-san, who’s been treated as the real Sage, has turned out to be a person like this.”

Emilia: “What do you mean by that?”

Anastasia: “The achievements that are bein’ circulated are the opposite… Hmm, no, I suppose that ain’t right. They’re weighted to one side, rather than bein’ the opposite. I reckon it may be very likely that they were more or less pushed onto her on purpose.”

Emilia: “So, in other words, you mean that it was made to look like Shaula-san did things that were actually done by Flugel-san?”

Emilia opened her eyes in surprise as she heard Anastasia’s hypothesis. After Anastasia nodded at her understanding, she turned around to face Shaula once again.

Anastasia: “I’ve got my suspicions about this, but Shaula-san, what do ya think? I wonder, was yer Master the sort to try ‘n do these sorts of things, Shaula-san?”

Shaula: “Yeah~, though I don’t quite understand this difficult talk.”

Subaru: “You better not be…”

Shaula: “Nonononono! You’re jumping to conclusions! Let me continue properly with what I was going to say!”

Right after Subaru narrowed his eyes at her vague reply, Shaula shook her head as if in fright. And then, she lifted both of her hands up and as she nonsensically blinked her palms open and closed, she said,

Shaula: “If I’mmmm~ being honest, there’s much that I don’t understand about Master’s thinking. But, when it comes to Master, he was a person who didn’t really like to stand out. So, I think~ it’s quite like Master to aim the brunt of the annoying gossip onto meeeee~ and run away.”

Subaru: “I don’t think a person who didn’t want to stand out would’ve planted a tree called the Flugel’s Great Tree, though…”

Julius: “Subaru, you’ve got the wrong idea. It’s not like Flugel’s Great Tree was a Great Tree from the moment it was planted. Many months and years passed by, until finally it attained its majestic appearance from its growth into full bloom. Given that the name of the person who planted it was left behind, it’s not that strange that future generations began to call it like that.”

Subaru: “…I don’t even know what to say to that.”

Subaru’s face grew sour as he comprehended Julius’s explanation.

Indeed, back then, it would have been one of many, but after many long years, it had ended up growing into a magnificent Great Tree. They had probably wanted to give it a name, and when they came to do so, they’d gone with the “Then, let’s name it after the person who planted it” option. That felt like what would’ve been natural.

If that was the case, then he felt like it had been an oversight of Flugel’s to have left his name behind.

Subaru: “If he feels like hiding, then I feel like he should’ve avoided leaving the name Flugel behind in the first place. Isn’t there something missing here?”

Julius: “I read this in a book, but if I’m not mistaken, the reason why we know Flugel-san’s name is… because «Flugel was here» was carved onto that Great Tree, right?”

Subaru: “As if there’s something missing! He’s like a student on a field trip!?”

Subaru was taken aback by this episode where it seemed like he had craved the limelight more than expected.

He recalled that he'd wanted to do something similar back when he'd been standing next to the Great Tree, however when it came to him actually putting that into motion, well, that was another story. In the first place, when Flugel would have carved it in, the Great Tree still shouldn't have been a Great Tree in the first place.

Julius: "That name stood alone, and thus, Sage Flugel ended up being passed down in legend as an enigmatic historical figure that has next to no information about him other than having planted the tree."

Subaru: "So, isn't the belief that Flugel was the one who planted the tree unclear too!?"

Julius: "With that, time passed, and it was verified as being correct from the mouth of a different Sage. Now that I think about it… Hmmm. We are standing in a place which is chock-full of missing history, does it not make your heart leap just a little?"

Subaru: "Don't start talking as if you're a history nerd…"

Being acquainted with obscure historical facts from several centuries, Julius was deeply moved.

Julius had the tendency to speak too much when explaining things regarding magic rather than him having deep insight into it, however, perhaps he did have a knowledge nerd side to him here.

Emilia: "But, even though I get that the Sage of antiquity was actually Flugel in reality… this still doesn't change much, right?"

When their opinions came to match each other regarding Flugel's actions, Emilia diffidently glanced over everyone's faces. Receiving her gaze, Subaru nodded his head in agreement.

As Emilia had said, the fact that it had actually been Flugel who'd really been behind the legendary exploits of the past did not hold much meaning for them at the present—— No, that was not true at all.

Subaru: "Nope, Emilia-tan. This fact is a pretty big problem."

Emilia: "Huh?"

Subaru: "I mean, shouldn't it be? Our purpose from the start was to come here to hear various things from the famed Sage-san who's said to be omniscient. But, since the Sage-san from the rumors has turned out to be a different person, and all he's left behind is this obviously air-headed girl, we…"

Shaula: “Ohhh, Master~, I want you to not shake my head. You’re making it go clatter-clatter.”

Shaula gave off that reaction, full of jest, as he shook her shoulders.

If he put it without mincing his words, she was far off from being omniscient by any stretch of the imagination.

Subaru: “To start with, our original purpose can’t be fulfilled—— If the Sage isn’t here, then it means we came all the way here for nothing.”

Everyone: “————”

Emilia and the others kept their mouths shut at Subaru’s conclusion. Subaru gritted his back teeth at his own conclusion whilst he looked at everyone’s reactions.

Over a month had passed, and Subaru had already died four times.

Only a guardsman who was a Sage in name only had been left behind in Pleiades Watchtower; to reach it, they had surmounted so much hardship. They would not be able to bring back any results due to this.

The reality of history, the true state of the Sage. Those things were of no value to him.

Since Subaru only desired for a way to save the people important to him.

Subaru: “Shaula. This may be a long shot, but just tell me this. Your Master… The one who should be the real Sage, Flugel, where is he?”

Shaula: “Right now, if I were to answer with… right in front of myyyy~ eyes, I get the feeling you’d be mad at me! But, I gotta answer it! The one right in front of myyyy~ eyes is my Master, Flugel!”

Subaru: “I thought you’d say that.”

Subaru could merely sigh at Shaula’s undiscouraged response.

In fact, Subaru’s current feelings were similar to that of a barren wasteland, overwhelming any urge he had in wanting to burst out in anger at the upbeat Shaula. Their circumstances were such that they could say their leads had come to nothing.

The glimmer of hope which had been the Sage had blinked out, and it looked like things would just go back to them fumbling around blindly. However, the subsequent darkness that came after they had seen a dazzling glimmer once in the dark had a different weight to it.

Hope gave people the strength to step forward, but perhaps the dark when hope covered it was something which dyed people's vision in black, rather than always being in the darkness.

Either way, for Subaru it meant that——

Emilia: "Subaru, listen. It may surely be like that, but in truth it doesn't mean that we're at an impasse."

Subaru: "Huh?"

Emilia placed her hand on Subaru's shoulder and spoke out to him from the side of his face, which had been drooping down gloomily. Turning his face to look at her, he saw that Emilia's amethyst eyes were full of unwavering hope.

Giving Subaru a short nod whilst she still touched his shoulder, Emilia continued speaking, saying "Isn't that right?" to Shaula.

Emilia: "Although you'd barely spoken anything to us until a little while ago, the current you should be able to speak to us in a quite a bit more detail, right?"

Shaula: "Sure thing. I dislike it when Master's feeling down tooo~, but also I was all alone for such a long time, so I'd love to chat."

Shaula replied to Emilia's meaningful questioning with a genial look to her, keeping her attitude unchanged. She sat cross-legged, swaying back and forth; then, she moved her right hand up, and pointed it up overhead.

Shaula: "I said a bit of this to the others, but we're on the bottom-most floor of the Tower here. This is the Sixth Floor Asterope. As you go up, there's the Fifth Floor Celaeno, then the Fourth Floor Alcyone, and at the tippy-top there's the First Floor Maia."

Subaru: "You named each of the floors? Wasn't that a hassle?"

Shaula: "Didn't you name them, Master?"

Subaru: “I don’t have such bad taste, but I don’t want to talk about that right now. So?”

There was hope in Emilia’s eyes, and with the flow of Shaula’s conversation promoting that, Subaru’s mood grew in impatience. Shaula broke into a delighted smile as if she’d perceived that change in his expression.

Still pointing up above, she stuck out her other hand, her left hand, and showed him her five fingers,

Shaula: “The Fifth Floor Celaeno, is straight above, on that floor you’ll find the doorway that leads outside. The Sixth Floor Asterope, is underneath it, so in fact, it connects straight to the underground area. If you hit it in the wrong place, you’ll end up buried alive, so It’d be best that you don’t do anything reckless like trying to break the wall.”

Julius: “Incidentally, the wall and floor seem to look like they are made out of stone when you first look at them, but they have an unusual strength to them. Let me just say now that they would not be chipped even a bit with either Emilia-sama’s magic, or mine of course.”

Of course, that probably didn’t mean he had tried to destroy them, but Julius nevertheless supplemented Shaula’s explanation. He had no intentions of destroying the Tower at all, but he nodded with an “I see”, just to be safe.

Subaru: “So, I get that the Fifth Floor has the doorway, but what about above that?”

Shaula: “The Fourth Floor Alcyone, is like myyy~ dwelling area, a simple place for my ins and outs. I like to leave it messy, so I’m gonna get embarrassed if you look at it too hard~.”

Subaru: “————”

Shaula: “Master, your eyes look serious. How scary… U-usually I stand watch over the Sand Dunes from here. And, then I take aim and fire fire fire at anyone who gets near the Tower!”

Subaru: “So it indeed was you, then.”

He’d already half-guessed it before, but he could be fully convinced now thanks to her testimony. The white light from the Pleiades Watchtower, that had killed Subaru twice in the Sand Dunes, and had also

been the reason as to why their team was separated into two after—— The culprit had been, as he had surmised, Shaula.

Subaru: “We went through so much suffering thanks to that, how the hell do you plan to make up for that?”

Shaula: “Sorrysorry, I was juuust~ following Master’s instructions; by saying that, you’re just fussing about what I’ve been doing here for the past hundreds of years~.”

Subaru glared at her, speaking in a harsh tone, causing Shaula to quiver back, her face growing disheveled. There was no ill will showing on her face, and moreover, she showed no signs of remorse either.

Rather than lacking a sense of guilt, she did not seem to feel guilty in the first place.

It wasn’t an issue where she lacked emotions, but rather——

Beatrice: “Subaru, no matter what you say there’s no use in this, in fact. There’s no sense of remorse or guilt in this one, I suppose. They just do as ordered… It doesn’t make sense to ask a tool their uses, in fact.”

Shaula: “Yepyep, I’mmmm~ Master’s tool! The lil’ ankle-biter says it well!”

Shaula had a big smile which said “That’s exactly what I thought” all over her face, as she heard Beatrice’s savage opinion.

Her moods and facial expressions changed fickly, and with that, his understanding of her current way of being—— perhaps Shaula just had different values. That was probably why they seemed to keep conversing as if they were on different wavelengths. In other words,

Subaru: “It’s getting real tiring talking with you.”

Shaula: “You used to say that all the time before! It’s been aaaages~.”

Subaru: “Is that so? You know, I used to say that all the time, donkey years ago.”

He felt like he still did now, but Subaru brushed aside that point.

In any case, he understood that the white light that had come from the Watchtower had been Shaula's doing, as well as that he'd never get any kind of apology or remorse from her.

In that case, there was no meaning in cutting their conversation short. He'd just have to move the conversation forward.

Subaru: "About the Fourth Floor, your dwelling area… Like, your living quarters. What's above that?"

Shaula: "On the Third Floor Taygeta, there's the examination hall—— To test one's rights to enter the library."

Subaru: "…The library?"

Subaru frowned, repeating the word back to her as a question. Shaula calmly nodded back at him saying "Yeah" without paying heed to Subaru's change in attitude.

Shaula: "The library. From the Third Floor Taygeta and up, there's Examinations[65], and each one has a corresponding library. If you fulfill the conditions to enter the library, then you can read the books inside at your leisuuure~."

Subaru: "What's written in those «books inside»?"

Shaula: "Errrrr?"

Subaru: "Errrrr!?"

It was frustrating that she'd finished with an "Errrrr", considering that she'd told him this much whilst assuming an air of importance. Shaula reluctantly shook her head along with her hair at the frowning Subaru, and said "It's because~".

Shaula: "I can't read the books and stuff, I've not been told more than to guard the Tower."

Subaru: "Was that from your Master… from Flugel as well?"

[65] As a reminder, the original translation of Trials has been changed to Examinations because later exchanges get completely shagged unless Arc 4's Trials get renamed as Ordeals, which is a complete no.

Shaula: “Yeah!”

It would be impossible for Subaru to answer, regardless of how she had put it so proudly.

Though Subaru had only inclined his head in doubt at Shaula’s words, Emilia and the others still kept serious looks on their faces; the hope present in their eyes was still there.

Beatrice: “Subaru, what lies inside the books of the library is knowledge, I suppose.”

Subaru: “By knowledge, you don’t mean it in a literal sense, right?”

Subaru asked the obvious back after hearing Beatrice’s expression.

Typically, what was written down in books was knowledge, barring fiction of course. What one would get out of books was either a wealth of knowledge, or deep, moving impressions.

But that probably wasn’t the meaning behind what Beatrice was trying to say.

Beatrice shook her head on top of Subaru’s lap. Her long drill curls traced her head’s movement, and she spoke out to Subaru, who was following that motion with his eyes.

Beatrice: “This is the place where the knowledge written down by the Sage known as being omniscient sleeps, and Pleiades Watchtower seems to be the name used in the outside, in fact.”

Shaula: “Yeah. Since Master’s came back inside, the Tower will go back to its original role. A Great Library where you can search for anything you like, be it something you want to know or something you’d like to be aware of—— You can do that in Pleiades.”

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Subaru: “So that means the Third Floor is at a beginner level. The Second Floor is at an intermediate level. And you can get access to the top-class information on the First Floor, I think. So it must mean that the Examinations are Qualification Examinations to obtain clearance, right?”

Shaula: “Ohhh, as expected of Master! Even I keep getting more and more confused with what you’re talking about! But perhaps it’s *yoi*[66] that you keep it simple.”

——The Great Library Pleiades.

The name of the Watchtower had gone from something quite affable to something quite suspicious. Subaru and the others, line astern, had left the Sixth Floor and had begun climbing the stairs up towards the upper floors.

The spiral staircase carried Subaru and the others up to the floors above, coiling around circularly within the Tower. However, since there was no manner of railing, the higher he got, the more his blood ran cold.

Subaru: “This is scary.”

Emilia: “Subaru, if you’re scared, then hold my hand? Since you still haven’t fully recovered, and you’re unsteady on your feet, you might actually fall off.…”

The ground of the Sixth Floor was getting far in the distance, and Gian along with the dragon carriage looked pretty small down there. Emilia called out to Subaru, who had looked down below, holding his breath.

To tell the truth, he wanted to take her hand and enjoy the feeling of her pale fingers, but,

Subaru: “Thanks, Emilia-tan. But, I’m alright right now. For the time being it doesn’t seem like I’ll fall off since the stairs are fairly wide, that, and I’m also still full of vim and vigor, don’t you think?”

Emilia: “Really? But, if you think it’s getting tough, you’ll tell me straight away, right? I can carry you on my back if it comes down to it.”

Subaru: “Is that so… Then I won’t make it come down to that.”

[66] Engrish flip. Means “good/fine” (良い), originally “OK”. Different from the previous “OK” because this is a better option in context.

The impression of being carried up the stairs on Emilia's back was, as expected, too horrifying. He would rather make that loan out to Julius, were he to make such an unmanly move.

???: "What is it?"

Subaru: "That'd just be the worst way too, though. Oh, it's nothing in particular. Keep moving, keep moving!"

Noticing Julius's eyes on him, who had just turned his head around, Subaru shook his hand at him. He shrugged his shoulders and continued to lead them up the stairs, still holding Anastasia's hand.

Right now, they had their eyes set on the upper floors of the Tower, progressing on foot. They were in no rush, so they went about it at a leisurely pace, which contrasted their feelings of apprehension. Julius and Anastasia were at the front, then after them came Ram and Emilia line astern, with Subaru and Beatrice walking behind them. And finally, Shaula and Meili were bringing up the rear.

Meili: "Whoooa~ there, naked onee-san, don't shake about so much."

Shaula: "Huuuuh~, you sure are a bossy lil' ankle-biter for someone whose riding on my shoulders~."

Meili: "Beeecause~, I'm sleeeepy~. We've been waaalking~ for ages, and I can't make it up and down the stairs with how many stairs there aaare~."

Shaula: "Yes, but why do I have to carry you…! Quit pulling on my hair!"

Fussy as she may be, there was no sharpness in their exchange.

The Shaula and Meili group bringing up the rear was, rather incredibly, such that Shaula was carrying Meili on her shoulders as they climbed the stairs. Initially, when they'd decided to move up, Meili had taken the opportunity to complain that her feet were tired. However, it had been Shaula herself who had said she would be okay with carrying her on her back, so he had left it down to her.

Subaru: "When it comes to actual physical strength, it looks like Shaula is likely the strongest…"

Beatrice: "That's for sure, I suppose—— Subaru, don't let your guard down, in fact. Despite her appearance, we don't know when she'll show her fangs, I suppose."

Subaru: “This woman? You get that impression from her?”

Beatrice: “We don’t know how she will react if it comes to light that you’re not Flugel, in fact.”

Subaru: “That’s…”

Subaru ended up stammering his words as he heard Beatrice’s response, her having urged him caution in a low voice.

It was not that the thought had not passed through his mind, but he did not believe that leaving it at the edge of his thoughts would be a problem. In fact, Shaula was acting pretty friendly towards his group—— No, towards Subaru, and that was only because she kept mistaking him as being her Master.

And Subaru and the rest knew that her relation with him was something she was completely misunderstanding. He had denied it to her many times till now, but Shaula would just smile and disregard it. Actually, rather than disregarding it, it was more like she did not care at all, no matter how many times she heard it. But, in any case, it had not gotten through to her.

Therefore, Shaula’s attitude had not changed, and he could even consider it a security——

Subaru: “That means that we won’t know what trigger will bring everything crumbling down.”

Beatrice: “There’s no doubt that things will end up quite worrisome if she were to become hostile, I suppose. We’d have no choice but to combine mine and your strength, as well as Emilia and that Knight’s… Julius’s, in fact.”

Subaru: “Shaula’s strength, huh?”

He took a quick glance back at Shaula messing about with Meili.

She had a friendly, and defenseless look to her improper appearance—— Ever since their first encounter, all the way to their conversations afterwards, she had been an individual that had been difficult to judge in every manner.

However, although Subaru currently could not decide what attitude to hold against Shaula, no harbored animosity stood out in her; that much was what it looked like. Although she was acting friendly towards

them because she was mistaking him for someone else, and although they had been met with such an unguarded reception from her, it was more difficult to dislike her than be bewildered by her.

However, he must not confuse such touchy-feely emotions with there being a lack of looming danger.

Subaru: "————"

Turning his eyes at their defenseless limbs whilst sneaking glances at Shaula's condition, Subaru broke into thought.

She had confessed that it had been her who had set her aim on Subaru and the others back at the Sand Dunes, having thrown those flashes of light at them from the Tower. The speed of those flashes of light, along with the accuracy of their aim, had been unnatural; they had been plenty enough to give him an inkling of the levels of Shaula's true strength. Right now, Subaru did not even know whether those things had been magic or not.

And to add on top of that, there had been those final moments back at the underground area of the Sand Dunes.

That which remained in his awfully turbid consciousness, just before he lost it, must have been Shaula who had come to blows with that repulsive-looking Centaur.

That monster was one which could only be thought of as being either the embodiment of absurdity or outrageousness, and was abruptly torn to pieces by a more powerful force, and he witnessed it being blown away out of existence with his own eyes.

He did not want to admit it, but if he ended up in direct combat against Shaula, any visions of being able to win against her were all but gone.

Regulus, Petelgeuse and such had been far easier opponents.

Subaru: "…Ugh, I don't know why I start to feel pretty repulsed whenever I recall those guys. No, feeling that is perfectly reasonable, but it's a familiar repulsed feeling that I'm getting."

Beatrice: "I don't know what you're thinking, but we need to be careful, I suppose."

Subaru: "Yeah. If that's the case… then I guess asking her is quicker."

Beatrice: “Huh, in fact?”

Straight after Beatrice replied in confusion, Subaru turned both himself and her around at the same time. Whilst swiveling his feet around on the stairs so they faced back, Subaru faced straight towards the double-stacked Shaula and Meili.

Shaula stopped in her tracks and tilted her head.

Shaula: “What’s up, Master? It couldn’t be that Master’s also tired right? It wouldn’t be an issue for me to carry you, but my back is already taken by this girl who acts like a little princess, you know?”

Subaru: “That in itself would make quite an impression, so I’ll pass. Ah, though I’m sorry to get in between you happily playing with your ponytail with Meili…”

Shaula: “It’s not a ponytail, it’s a scorpiontail[67].”

Subaru: “————”

Shaula: “It’s a scorpiontail.”

Shaula repeated herself to the taciturn Subaru as if she were a broken record. Grabbing ahold of one of her ponytail’s tufts, Shaula readily moved it in front of her face, and said,

Shaula: “A scorpiontail…”

Subaru: “I understand! What’s up with this insistence! Anyways, I’m sorry to get in between you making friends with Meili, but there’s something I want to ask you.”

Shaula: “Mhm! If it’s something Master has to say, I will listen to anything! I’mmmm~ glad that you’re speaking to me like this, Master~.”

Shaula swung her ponytail—— Err, rather, her scorpiontail about delightedly.

[67] As a fun fact, these two words are Engrish. “Ponytail” is written as “ポニーテール”, with “ポニー” being read as the English word “pony”. The same applies to “scorpiontail”, written as “スコーピオンテール”, with “スコーピオンテ” being read as the English word “scorpion”.

As a result of that, Meili, who was on her shoulders, was hit by one of the tail's swishes. Subaru had already experienced that unexpectedly soft, good feeling tail, but putting that aside,

Subaru: "You'll listen to what I say, right?"

Shaula: "Not lewd stuff, right?"

Subaru: "Don't even start going there. What are you, braindead?"

Shaula: "It's pretty dumb of Master to say so, isn't it? Now we're even!"

Subaru was left floored as he was incapable of keeping up pace with Shaula, who'd had a comeback to spare. Usually, most people ended up getting thrown quite out of sync when mixing in with the pace of Subaru's conversations. Because of that, suitably finding a thread to start a conversation came down to Subaru, but it would be tough to do this time.

The difficulty in this sort of line of approach was also different compared to aberrations like the Sin Archbishops. In their case, it would be difficult to establish a conversation with them to start with, but it was different in Shaula's case.

He felt a delay in proportion to not understanding his opponent whatsoever, whilst she understood him.

Truly, as if Flugel, Subaru, and god-knows-who-else had a lot of points in common.

Subaru: "Anyways, I have a question and a request. I need you to answer them as honestly, and obediently as possible."

Shaula: "That doesn't seem like a request. They could be an order, though."

Subaru: "I ain't that bossy. So, about the question… You attacked us from the Tower, right? What the hell was that?"

Shaula: "It was *Jigoku no Sogeki*[68], a sniping attack used so that pesky flies don't get near to the Tower."

[68] Engrish flip. Means "Sniping of Hell (lit.)" (地獄の狙撃), originally "ヘルズ・スナイプ" (Hell's Snipe).

Subaru: "…What?"

Shaula: "*Jigoku no Sogeki*."

With her having said it in English whilst beaming, Subaru's face grew sullen.

Well, it was a name he could understand.

Shaula: "Thoooough~, if I think about it now, I'm so glad that *Jigoku no Sogeki* didn't hit Master. If *Jikuumon*[69] hadn't been lifted, I would've flung blow after blow until they struck Master."

Subaru: "Waitwaitwaitwait, there's too much new vocab! *Jikuu*?"

Shaula: "*Jikuumon*. It's a trick to prevent people from reaching the Tower."

From Shaula's way of talking, Subaru grasped that this *Jikuumon*, and whatever else, had cut off their path to the Flower Meadow thanks to that Sand Time, but even so, the spatial distortion had been lifted by the effect of E・M・T in the end.

Shaula: "But, thanks to that, I knew that Master was actually Master, so everything turned alright in the end. If Master'd been struck, Master would definitely have been mad at meee~, wouldn't he?"

Subaru: "Uh huh, yeah, probably. I hope you'd get away with just me being mad at you."

In actual fact, he had been struck twice, and he had died twice, so he was worried about whether he could even get up to those anger levels.

It was rare for his anger to not spike up rapidly upon meeting the culprits who had murdered him. Part of the reason why it hadn't just now, was because he understood that it had been some kind of accident, and that it was pointless even to pursue Shaula's responsibility.

Meili: "Buuut~, if you'd managed to strike him, Onii-san would've ended up dead, wouldn't heee~? If that happened, then I don't think we'd be talking about getting mad or not heeere~."

[69] Engrish flip. Means "Space-Time Gate" (時空門), originally "ディメンジョン・ゲート" (Dimension Gate). If you're cringing as much as I am, then it means this is working.

Perched on Shaula's back, Meili interjected into the conversation in place of Subaru, who was half embroiled in his forgiveness. Upon hearing her words, Shaula let out a fit of rather unladylike, uncontrollable laughter.

Shaula: "What are you saying, lil' ankle-biter? There's no way myyyy~ Master would die from something like that? 'Cause from the start, Master's always been someone who you can never tell whether he's dead or not dead."

Meili: "Butbuuut~, Sand Earthworm-chan got hit so much, and he ended up dying, sooo~…"

Shaula: "I don't really give a damn about stuff like Earthworms or Bears you know. Myyy~ Master wouldn't die, that is what's important—— If he had died, then it'd just mean he's not my Master."

Smiling absentmindedly, Shaula gazed at Subaru with delighted-looking eyes. Subaru's spine shivered when she'd turned her innocent, smiling face towards him.

Innocence like that of a child's, and faith tantamount to defenselessness. That which she put into Flugel was an ideal that she had rigidly built up at her core more than he dared to imagine.

In accordance with Beatrice's worries, if there ever came a time where she'd come into disagreement with the current Subaru, then——

Shaula: "I apologize that I was late in picking you up from the Sand Palace afterwards. Whilst I let in the other group into the Tower, Master and the rest with him ended up advancing into its depths, so I was all in a fluster."

Subaru: "Ahh, no, it's fine… Though, wait, you said Sand Palace[70]?"

Shaula: "Indeed. It's really dangerous over there, so it's better if you don't go into it. It's reckless to approach it without having all the Keys, even if it's you, Master. There are Hungry Horse Kings prowling about there too."

[70] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "«砂宮» could mean either «Sand Palace» or «Sand Shrine» in English. It does not use the same Kanji as the Shrine where the Witch is sealed, which is «祠», but there may be an etymological relation between them if anyone feels like researching".

Subaru: “Hungry Horse Kings… You mean those horse-like monsters?”

Sand Palace, Keys, Hungry Horse Kings. There were a lot of words weighing on his mind, but his mind wandered to the last one of them, the Hungry Horse Kings.

Perhaps it referred to that Centaur.

Shaula nodded at his question.

Shaula: “Those things weren’t here around the time Master was here, so I thought you’d be surprised. In essence, they just prowl about inside of the Sand Palace, so you won’t come across them unless you go there. But once in a while, one of those guys will venture outside, so I go and destroy them without any mercy.”

Subaru: “Are there a lot of them?”

Shaula: “There’s tons and tons.”

Subaru felt truly revulsed from the bottom of his heart hearing Shaula confirm that without any hesitation.

The fighting strength of the Centaur, or rather, the Hungry Horse King, and of course its appearance and ecology were all things which brought feelings of indescribable unpleasantness. He had hoped that there would be just one specimen of them if possible, but it did not look like it was the case. She had conveyed that to him, using the expression “tons and tons”.

Meili: “Hungry Horse King… I’m also not familiar with that naaame~. I’d like to see one, maaaybe~.”

Subaru: “Stop it! That’s not something a kid needs to see…”

Meili: “O-onii-san…”

With her having voiced those rash words, Subaru gave Meili a very stern warning. Maybe those words had tugged on Meili’s heartstrings, her being something like a Witchbeast Collector, but he wouldn’t recommend her trying to get in contact with them to fill in a picture book.

Shaula nodded in agreement at Subaru’s words.

Shaula: “I think it’s best not to. The Hungry Horse Kings are a Witchbeast with the concept that their horns can regenerate over and over again, so you can’t make arrangements with them like with other Witchbeasts. Kill all enemies on sight, this is their justice.”

Meili: “Blegh, I understaaand~.”

Pouting with a gesture appropriate of her age, Meili retracted her curiosity.

Whilst feeling relieved by that situation, Shaula once again spoke out to Subaru, saying “So”.

Shaula: “Master, was that all you wanted to talk about?”

Subaru: “Ahh, for now that’s a… No, wait, that’s not all.”

Shaula: “——?”

With her head still inclined, Shaula prepared to receive his question with a “Bring it on!” attitude. Considering that she had opened her heart to them till now, it was quite insincere of him to continue keeping his guard up. But sometimes, no matter how painful it was, to steel one’s heart was necessary.

If he could change something by just saying one thing in preparation for the future, then doing so would be fortuitous.

Subaru: “Shaula, this is my request. Don’t cause me, or my companions, any harm.”

Shaula: “————”

Subaru: “Your Master’s order was to attack anyone who approached the Tower… So I would think? Since we’re inside, we are not covered by that. So, there’s no need for you to attack us anymore. Don’t cause us any harm. Absolutely none.”

Shaula: “————”

Shaula narrowed her eyes at Subaru, who had repeated his words once more to make absolutely sure.

As he gazed towards her narrowed eyes, he saw that their color was of a deep green hue. Shaula, whose expression had been pretty much all smiles since they had come across her, had stopped smiling as if she were in deep thought for the first time.

For a while, there was silence. Subaru, who'd been holding his breath due to this strange tension, let it out, unable to stand it any longer. Then,

Shaula: "Mhm, *yoshi*. I'veee~ memorised it word-for-word as a new command from Master~."

Subaru: "————"

Shaula: "Master?"

Immediately after she decided to accept it, Shaula's features changed, turning back to her frivolousness. Shaula brought her face super close to Subaru's, whose eyes had widened without following her sudden change in attitude.

Their eyes stared at each other's at point-blank range, but he could not find any deception or dishonesty in her green eyes. At least, as far as Subaru could see.

Subaru: "Is it okay with you?"

Shaula: "I have no choice. It's what Master has said. It's not particularly hard. Non-violent non-obedience."

Subaru: "Since you're going to follow the order, don't you mean that you'll obey?"

Shaula: "Even if you could do as you pleased with my body, I wouldn't let you snatch away my heart!"

Subaru: "What a pain in the ass you are…!"

He prodded Shaula in the forehead, whose face had tensed up, so to make her take a step back. Shaula fell back letting out an "AUUUUH", causing Meili to panic on her back, even though she was safe.

In any case, Subaru's request somehow looked like it had been readily accepted. It was unclear how effective it was going to be, but, at least——

Subaru: “Like, as long as I don’t let her down, the promise should be kept.”

Beatrice: “If that’s the only requirement, then things will be fine, in fact. Subaru expects to let her down, but you won’t, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I’m really grateful for being held to that high esteem, but in this case, isn’t that part of your expectations where you think I won’t let her down being far too optimistic? What would Flugel do? Should I grow wings? Sounds like he’s German.”

On that topic, to Subaru it felt like “Flugel” was a German word that meant “wings”.

He had never expected that he’d be pulling stuff out from there, but that was suspicious as well. At any rate, this Flugel, altogether with Shaula’s name, smelled fishy as hell.

Subaru: “That’s right, Shaula. I’ve got just one last question to ask you.”

Shaula: “What is it~?”

Shaula’s cheeks were getting pinched by Meili, her face looked completely vapid. With his back still turned to Shaula, Subaru spoke with a casual gesture,

Subaru: “Maia, Electra, Taygeta, Alcyone, Celaeno, Asterope.”

Beatrice: “…Subaru?”

Beatrice, who was beside Subaru, had a puzzled look on her face as she heard Subaru reciting those words out.

They were just a string of words which should hold no meaning, when only hearing their sounds.

Of course, they had just heard about four of those words a while ago, but they wouldn’t be words which were so easy to remember as to recite them from memory—— Given that they were unfamiliar words.

Subaru: “All of those, in order from top to bottom, are this Pleiades Watchtower’s… Err, I mean this Great Library Pleiades’ floor names right?”

Shaula: “Correct~.”

Subaru: “So, where’s Merope?”

Shaula: “————”

Shaula once again kept her silence on hearing Subaru’s question. However, this silence was different to the one before, it was a silence of surprise like she had been caught completely unaware.

The sound of her breath being taken away could be faintly heard; Subaru deemed that he had managed to touch on the truth.

Beatrice: “Subaru, what did you ask her, in fact? What does Merope mean, I suppose.”

Subaru: “It’s the name of the last one of the seven sisters. It’d be strange to not have seven in Pleiades.”

The floors had been allocated six names from the First Floor to the Sixth. However, the names that followed that motif were from the start, the seven sisters—— A floor with the seventh name attached to it should exist.

Subaru: “If it’s not the Seventh Floor… then I guess it would be a Zeroth Floor.”

Shaula: “There’s a Zeroth Floor. Master named them, so it’s natural… However, the place was made after Master left, so you shouldn’t know where it is.”

Shaula replied to Subaru’s guesswork with a hoarse voice. Subaru felt Beatrice beside him startle in surprise, but he licked his parched lips and narrowed his eyes.

He felt no sense of achievement at having found something hidden. After all, it was because it was not something hidden, for Subaru.

Subaru “If the First Floor is the highest floor, then Zeroth Floor must be the super-highest floor? In regards to entering it…”

Shaula: “——No.”

Shaula quickly interrupted Subaru’s words, who was about to ask her how to enter it. Feeling the strength in the tone of her voice, Subaru took a quick glimpse back at her. When he did, he saw that Shaula’s facial expression had not changed.

She was still smiling with a look of honesty about her. However, there was a faint look of loneliness plastered around her eyes.

Shaula: “You haven’t fulfilled the conditions yet. Master came back to see me in the middle of his journey, and I’m satisfied with that. That’s why the Zeroth Floor is a No.”

Subaru: “————”

Though her tone of voice still had not changed, it instead felt like a firm wall to the point that it felt queer.

The promise they had exchanged a few minutes ago, and the pervading danger that was quite capable of shaking him even at his core, strongly appealed to him of the sense of danger that was drifting off her.

Thus, Subaru gave up on inquiring her further about this place.

Subaru: “Gotcha. I won’t speak such nonsense anymore. We’ll just keep to our earlier promise.”

Shaula: “Roger that~. I shall keep it~. I shall super-keep it~.”

Shaula broke into a broad smile, in high spirits as if she’d forgotten their current exchange. Subaru let out a deep sigh as he listened to her upbeat voice from behind him.

Beatrice: “Subaru, if it gets too much, you’ll say so, right?”

Subaru: “Mhm, it’s alright. Just, so much stuff is on my mind.”

He gave a weak smile as he heard Beatrice’s words of worry, before then affectionately patting her head. Beatrice couldn’t say anything after he did so, but this was also a rite for Subaru to settle himself down.

Flugel’s abnormal status had become apparent in his conversation with Shaula. It was no big deal. He too, was the same as Subaru.

Subaru, Al, Hoshin, and Flugel.

A person who had craved the limelight, and had brought knowledge that should not exist in this world, and had ostentatiously left it behind. He had no more doubt, Flugel was a person from the same place as him.

Subaru: “Centuries ago, huh?”

After reflecting on that for a long, long time, Subaru violently scratched his head.

What had he felt in this different world, what had he thought, what had he aimed for, what had he sought for——

What had this man, who seemed to have renounced the name Sage and planted the tree, desired?

Whilst he thought about those kinds of things, he wondered whether he still lived on in this world.

Then, coming from Subaru’s back, was——

Shaula: “Master.”

Subaru: “Mhm?”

Shaula called out to him casually. Without stopping in his tracks, Subaru just turned his face around to glance at her. Shaula looked up at Subaru looking a little bashful.

Her expression was adorned by a truly delightful looking smile,

Shaula: “Welcome home again, Master—— This Shaula has been awaiting the Great Sage Flugel’s return with all her heart.”

Arc 6 Chapter 21 - The Monolith Challenge

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 1 “The Great Pleiades Library”, Parts 4-5, and Volume 22, Chapter 2 “A White Sky Asterism”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

Regarding Shaula’s welcoming words—— While Subaru did understand that they had been directed to a different person, he decided that he would receive them without denying them in the end.

There was also Beatrice’s advice.

There was no doubt that, in practice, allowing Shaula to mistake Subaru as Flugel was rather convenient for them. With this in place it now meant that an outcome where Shaula became hostile and commenced battle would not necessarily end up in them being scattered about by her overwhelming strength.

Since she was treating them favorably for now, Subaru could at least dullen his hand of attack. Though if he were to do that, considering that he lacked in actual strength even under the best of circumstances, it’d probably be enough to end up as a main factor in him making a colossal blunder.

Emilia: “You don’t need to worry, Subaru. Even if Shaula realizes that you’re not really her Master, I’m sure she wouldn’t do anything awful.”

Those were Emilia’s words, who seemed to have been eavesdropping on their conversation behind them.

Emilia, who had her silver hair styled in long braids, confidently assured that to Subaru, whilst fiddling with the end of one of her braids with her fingers.

Subaru: “I’m glad of Emilia-tan’s seal of approval, but… What’s the rationale behind it?”

Emilia: “I don’t really fully understand what you mean by the expression «what’s the rationale behind it», but, Shaula’s a good girl, isn’t she? She saved you, and us as well, so I can say that we will all get along. If we do, there shouldn’t be any need to fight, right?”

Subaru: “…Right.”

Her opinion was a little too optimistic, but he could say that being too pessimistic was also enough of a bad habit.

Even if Shaula found out the truth, it did not mean that she would become aggressive straight away. Even if the facts came to light, Shaula should keep herself from coming to blows at her own judgement. So, Emilia’s thoughts that they should all get along were not so misguided, at least he could allow himself to think so.

The reason behind that intent was not a calculating goal like appealing to one’s emotions, but rather because he did not wish to fight her.

Ram: “Don’t take Emilia’s rough ideas word for word, Barusu. We’re in the Sage’s Watchtower here, and we need to challenge it to even make our way back to the Sand Dunes. We lose nothing by keeping our guards up as much as possible.”

Emilia: “Geez, you sure were quick to put it like that, Ram. You should really loosen up a little…”

Ram: “The result of having let down my guard was that I ended up being sent down to the underground area with Barusu and Anastasia-sama. With how delicate I am, that feeling of despair was unbearable… perhaps that is why Emilia-sama has no clue about that.”

Emilia: “Mhm, I guess so. But surely, an underground area around here shouldn’t be a big deal for you, no? I don’t know why, but I’ve been in reaaally good shape since coming to the Augria Sand Dunes, you know?”

It seemed like Emilia had replied to the sharp Ram’s words in a rather relaxed manner. Emilia and Ram’s relationship as master and vassal had been pretty good since a year ago. The way Ram spoke and behaved towards Emilia showed a little lack of respect, but Emilia looked like she couldn’t help but be happy receiving that treatment.

Emilia, who had experienced the trauma of discrimination and contempt, may have contrarily felt that Ram's words didn't contain that sort of animosity.

Subaru: "At any rate, Emilia-tan, what do you mean by you being in good shape?"

Emilia: "How should I put it, the air goes well with my skin, I guess. Mana too has a slightly different tone to it depending on the country or region you're in, so I think something like that's happening, but… The Mana in this place especially seems to go well with my skin. Though I guess I shouldn't be very happy about that."

Subaru: "Well, I suppose so. But considering that this is the place where the Witch is sealed, full of these Witchbeasts…"

Emilia had clenched her fist as if she'd felt a surge of strength go through her. However, straight after, a bitter-looking smile appeared on her dismal-looking face. Her opinion had been an emboldened one, for sure, as he sympathized with the mood she was in.

Following from what he had mentioned above, he was silently grateful that Emilia's strength had grown in this area they were in, which was chock-full of danger with the Witch and the Witchbeasts. Yet even so, the figure which Shaula had defeated remained engraved in Subaru's mind, so that was not a reason that could end up giving him some optimism.

Subaru: "Though, the conditions have changed. Unlike before where she could attack us from the Tower without us being able to do anything, now that the distance is such that you can see each other's faces; Emilia-tan shouldn't end up losing against her."

Shaula: "What is it? What is it?"

Subaru: "Nothing, was just talking about how you have crazy good eyesight. You managed to hurl attacks at us from the Tower with pinpoint accuracy when we were really far off, didn't you? How the hell does that work?"

Shaula: "Ohhh, that's just done by linking myyyyy~ aim and myyyy~ stingers with Mana, and that makes it so it's pulled to where you are. *Jigoku no Sogeki* was Master's invention, you know?"

Subaru: "…I see, you didn't even have to train her, eh, Flugel."

He had gone through hell and back again thanks to that. He would probably never get a chance to talk to Flugel, but if he did get a chance much like he had gotten at the Tea Party, he'd definitely be giving him some very colorful, choice words.

Subaru let out a sigh as he heard the upbeat Shaula humming. Then——

Julius: "Sorry to interrupt you in the middle of your chat, but we have arrived at our destination."

Subaru: "Oh?"

On the spiral staircase which led to the upper floors of the Tower—— He heard Julius's voice, positioned at the front of the group, leading them up.

Lifting his face up due to the Knight's words, who was escorting Anastasia by the hand, he could suddenly see the ceiling from Julius's other side, standing diagonally up from him.

Subaru: "No, it's not the ceiling, but the floor part of the floor above, I should say."

Beatrice: "We must be on the Fifth Floor, Celaeno, I suppose. All there is here, is a door to the outside, Betty and the others first entered here, in fact."

Beatrice to his side commented that, just as they neared the Fifth Floor. As he nodded in agreement to her words, Subaru immediately noticed that something was out of place, and said, "Uh?".

If she was implying that, after they'd been separated, Emilia and the others had entered the Tower from the Fifth Floor, then——

Subaru: "How did the dragon carriage and Gian get down to the bottom floor? I mean, there's no way that this staircase is wide enough to let a dragon carriage roll by, right?"

Spreading his arms across the spiral staircase he'd walked up, Subaru checked its width. The width of the staircase was reasonably ample, but even so it would not fit two Subarus with arms stretched out abreast. It might have been barely possible to let the huge body of a ground dragon pass down, but there was no way that the carriage part of the dragon carriage was getting through.

And of course, letting the ground dragon walk down this long staircase itself was a path which really should not be trodden even were it to be theoretically possible.

Subaru: "Is there some sort of contraption like an *elevator* poking around here in fact? If there is, then we need to use it next time. Keeping healthy is great and all, but it ain't good to always disregard modern conveniences."

Emilia: "Sorry, I've got no idea what you're talking about[71]… But, how the dragon carriage got down there is simple. Shaula lifted it up and carried it down."

Subaru: "…*Pardon*[72]?"

Subaru felt like he'd missed something, and so he asked her again. Emilia frowned at his reply which had been spoken in English, but she nevertheless grasped that he seemed to have asked her to repeat herself, so she continued her words by saying, "So",

Emilia: "Shaula effortlessly lifted the dragon carriage along with the ground dragon, and simply brought them down to the bottom."

Subaru: "Nonononononono, there's no way. Wouldn't a dragon carriage weigh over a ton with how huge it is? And you said she did it as a set with the ground dragon too…"

Subaru peeled his eyes wide open at those horrifying remarks, but no one from his companions denied it. Finally, Shaula puffed out her ample chest in pride, and flared out her nostrils.

Shaula: "It's as she said, the one who carried them down was meee~. Oh man, it was a piece of cake. If I'd left the lizard near the doorway, he may have ended up becoming loopy due to the Miasma streaming in from the outside, don't you think? I was just a little worried. You can praise me you know!"

Subaru: "I do feel grateful, but now I know that your slender arms aren't actually slender arms, it weirds me out. A person with superhuman strength… I imagine even Reinhard wouldn't be able to do this!"

[71] "Elevator" would normally be an Engrish flip, as Subaru uses "エレベーター" (read "elevator"), but there is no other word in Japanese for this device in the context of carrying people; it's a loanword from English, hence why Emilia doesn't recognize it. While there is "昇降機", it is used solely for cargo elevators.

[72] This would have been a Engrish flip as well, but it wouldn't make sense with the narration right after.

Though in Subaru's mind, the most frightfully-shocking human was indisputably Reinhard, but wouldn't it likely be impossible, even for him, to haul something that weighed over what one would expect to be a human's ability?

Even if he could cut the world into ribbons with his sword pressure, even if he could walk on water, even if he could revive himself again, carrying a dragon carriage with one hand for him would be——

Subaru: "I guess he'd be able to do that. That makes me feel just a bit uneasy. Is that guy really human?"

Shaula: "Hmph, despite myyyy~ story, Master's thinking of someone else. Jealousy."

In any case, he now understood how the dragon carriage had been carried to the bottommost floor. He hadn't in actuality seen her carrying it, so the impact of the scene was diminished, but he had to take it as a new threat potential in the eventuality that the enraged Shaula problem cropped up.

And, just as they'd finished talking about that, the group arrived on the Fifth Floor. Celaeno, as had been pointed out many times, was where the entrance that connected the inside to the outside of the Tower was located.

A huge door had been built in one place at the back of the Tower, which was cylindrical in shape.

It was large enough that one would need to look up at it, and its width was easily close to ten meters. It was an unnecessarily huge door, but how much strength it would take to open it, that too was an issue——

Subaru: "Maybe this is some sort of trial gateway that makes it difficult to get in?"

Julius: "At least, when I attempted pushing it, it would not budge an inch. Thanks to that, we were unable to search for you, Anastasia-sama, and the others."

As he gazed at the super-huge door, Subaru let out a sigh, and Julius nodded at him. With it being as heavy as it looked, it seemed like this door would stop any challengers in their path.

Opening it may have been possible for Shaula, who could easily carry a dragon carriage in one hand, but for the average person it would have been impossible. Therefore, Emilia and Julius had ended up being unable to leave to search for Subaru and the others, and that looked like it had ended up worrying them a lot.

Beatrice: “But, it sure does look like it’s a bit creaky here and there, I suppose.”

Anastasia: “I think it’s ‘cause the Sand Wind’s kinda strong, the sand that gets blown up by the wind must be streamin’ in, don’t’cha think? When ya take a bit of a deep breath, it immediately feels like the inside of yer mouth’s getting’ full of sand, ‘n so it’s darn unpleasant.”

Sticking her tongue out, Anastasia traced it with her finger and cleaned some sand grains from it. Just like she had said, the inside of Subaru’s mouth too felt like it had sand in it. He’d taken notice that minute grains of sand always whirled around the Fifth Floor that led to the outside.

Julius: “The sand from the Sand Dunes is full of Miasma. If it is not taken seriously because it is rationalized as being just a small amount, it could end up eroding your body from the inside. We should move away from here as quickly as possible, so long as we have nothing to do here.”

Subaru: “In that case, let’s hop to it! My goal isn’t here, but rather on the Fourth Floor Alcyone… Though yet more stairs sounds exhausting.”

Shaula: “The same ol’ weakness~. But, rest assured. The staircase between the Fourth and Fifth Floor is way shorter than the one between the Fifth and Sixth Floor. If they were too far apart, even I’d feel tired going back and forth, so that was taken into consideration~.”

Meili: “Stop shaking me abooout~.”

Shaula, who’d spread her arms out wide inside of the sand cloud and ran about in it, was met with a karate chop to the back of her head from Meili. Looking at that scene from the corner of their eyes, the group went through the Fifth Floor and headed to the staircase that led up to the Fourth Floor.

The breeze gently streamed in, and upon looking up, through his sight that was clouded over in a haze of yellow by the gloomy view above, there was a ceiling that didn’t look so far away—— He could see the floor of the layer above, and it looked like her opinion had in fact been true, in that it wasn’t too far away.

And so, as they set their sights on the Fourth Floor Alcyone whilst chatting, the group continued to march on upwards—— And before long, they reached their target floor.

The constitution of the Fourth Floor itself wasn’t too different from the Fifth or Sixth Floor.

The cylindrical constitution of the Tower hadn't deviated from what it had been, and even its size hadn't changed dramatically—— Nevertheless, there was still an obvious change of atmosphere.

First of all, the size of the floor that went up the stairs was quite different to that of the lower floors.

The circular floor had become much narrower compared to them. And that wasn't too surprising, because a circular wall had been built up as a partition like the main partition of a building, and it used the space differently compared to the lower floors, which were comprised of one big floor with nothing else to them.

The spiral staircase from the lower floors connected straight to the heart of the Fourth Floor, and a great number of doors were dotted across the wall that encircled the surroundings, indicating that there were multiple rooms on this floor[73].

Shaula: "This is the Fourth Floor, Alcyone, that I use as myyy~ dwelling area. And, the Green Room which I think is what Master came here for is right here."

Subaru: "The Green Room…?"

As Subaru stood in bewilderment gazing at the Fourth Floor's novel appearance, Shaula, standing on the floor after having come out after him, pointed at one of the doors in front with an overly-dramatic gesture.

The doors on the Fourth Floor were all of a normal size, compared to the doorway on the Fifth Floor. It didn't look like they'd need any special powers to open them, but there was a strange feeling floating about the door she had pointed out.

Just like the name, Green Room, implied, the door was covered in countless green ivy, its state looking similar to what the unexplored region of a jungle might look like that had been left untouched for centuries.

Subaru: "By saying this is what you think I came here for, do you mean that Rem and Patrasche are here?"

[73] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "If the explanation is hard to digest, then just imagine it like two concentric circles, the inner one far smaller than the outer one which is of course the Tower's main walls. In the inner circle, there's a lot of doors, that leads to a bunch of different rooms compared to the Fifth Floor and Sixth Floor which were like one giant circular hall".

Shaula: “I don’t know their names, but the girl and the lizard are here.”

Ram: “You need not worry. You may rest assured that Rem and that ground dragon are inside.”

For the hesitant Subaru, Shaula’s testimony felt like it had lacked in reliability just a tad. Ram snorted her nose at them like she was looking down at them like idiots, cut into the lead of the group, and headed towards the Green Room.

She stretched out her hand over to the door covered in ivy, which looked like it was made of stone, and pushed it without any hesitation. Even with how thin her arms were, the door opened readily as if gliding open, and therefrom the Green Room came into view.

Ram: “Aren’t you coming in? Barusu.”

Subaru: “I’m coming, I’m coming.”

Subaru let go of his apprehension upon hearing Ram’s question, which sounded more like a test, and moved forward. Confidently entering the Green Room, following Ram who’d entered ahead of him.

However, straight after Ram and Subaru entered inside, the door slammed shut. Subaru turned to look behind him in surprise.

Subaru: “Oy, we’ve been split up.”

Ram: “There is no need to be scared—— This room seems to have a limit on how many people can enter it. The proprietor of the room seems to hate it.”

Ram said that about the debacle that had happened behind them, and brisky kept on moving forward. Subaru scratched his head at her explanation, and then immediately set out after her.

The Green Room did not betray the bizarreness of that door; its interior was covered in a copious amount of green. Wriggling plants stretched out just about everywhere you looked, across the ceiling, the walls and the floor. Every so often, he would need to stoop down to avoid the dangling ivy that got in his way, and sidestep it.

And, laying at the depths of this room dominated by such greenery was——

Subaru: “Rem… and Patrasche.”

There was a small plant-free space at the far back of this room immersed in greenery. Green grass grew dense and thick there, and some beds had been made, covered in small flowers that had taken bloom there.

Rem, her sleeping face ever the same, lay on top of the bed made up from vegetation and flowers.

Her white cheeks had not changed in color, and neither had her sleeping face. Her chest was rising and falling with each faint breath, but when it came to proof that she was alive, those were her only vital signs barring the warmth she gave off.

Yet even so, he felt a great sense of relief to the point that his strength fizzled out of him.

Subaru: “She really was safe, huh…”

Ram: “I did tell you so. Or, did you think that I would lie about Rem or something? What meaning would doing that have for me?”

Subaru: “I’m saying that, but I couldn’t help worrying until I saw her with my own eyes you know… And Patrasche, I’m glad that you’re safe too.”

Subaru gave a faint bittersweet smile as he heard Ram’s words, and then he walked further in towards where Rem was sleeping on her bed of grass and Patrasche sat crouched down.

She too was lying sprawled on a bed of green, just like Rem. The situation wasn’t all too different compared to when she’d lie down on top of her rushes in a barn. However, one thing was definitely different——

Subaru: “…This grass is different from ordinary grass, isn’t it?”

Patrasche: “————”

Patrasche nuzzled her nose against Subaru’s palm, who’d stepped over to her to make sure she was alright. Whilst affectionately receiving his beloved dragon’s response, Subaru felt a faint surge of warmth coming from the sprawled bed of greenery which Patrasche was on—— he cocked his head in thought.

Ram: “It appears like the Spirit’s power can speed up the healing process.”

Subaru: “There’s… a Spirit here? Where?”

Ram: “You are a Spiritual Arts User and you do not know? This whole room is the Spirit.”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru briskly looked around the room at Ram’s words as he stroked Patrasche. The existence of the Spirit amongst the moss that grew on the walls or in the overgrown ivy was not reflected in his eyes, however straight after she’d told him that, Subaru took notice of the overwhelming mass of Mana there.

His breathing and body felt at ease as if he was in an area rich in oxygen.

There may have been a similar effect to that in Healing Mana. Even the uninjured Subaru felt like he was receiving its benefits upon relaxing himself and taking deep breaths.

Subaru: “I think I get it. This is the Spirit for sure… Can’t it talk?”

Ram: “The Spirit here is of a different kind… Though, I guess you could easily say that there is no such thing as Spirits who do not differ in some capacity. Emilia-sama’s esteemed Great Spirit, and Beatrice-sama… They are special, it does not seem like the Spirit over here has any sort of volition. It just attempts to cure the wounds and illnesses of anyone who enters inside.”

Subaru: “Pff, hmm.”

Ram: “What’s the matter?”

Subaru: “It’s nothing important. I just thought that sounded like a Witch I know of.”

Ram snorted her nose at that, as if she thought hearing the word “Witch” was just some nonsense of his, then she walked over to Rem’s side. Following that, ivy began growing right behind her, rapidly knitting itself together until it became a green chair that propped her body up, as if it had been cognizant of the elder sister’s intentions to watch over her younger sister.

Ram bowed her head in consideration for the Spirit, and spoke “My thanks”, as she let herself slump on the chair.

Subaru: “Whooooa, awesome.”

Ram: “At least, they are certainly the most gentlemanly amongst the Spirits I have known up until now, don’t you think? You too should follow their example just a tad, Barusu. From both this Spirit, and that Knight, Julius.”

Subaru: “I’d rather not from either of them.”

Subaru drove both of those individuals away from his head, and stroked Patrasche. He stroked her head, and tickled underneath her chin with his palm, before slowly letting her drop her raised head.

Subaru: “Get some rest now. You saved me once again, and overworked yourself. There’s no drawback in taking some paid leave every once in a while, you know.”

Patrasche: “————”

Patrasche curled her body up, closed her yellow eyes and fell asleep after she heard Subaru’s gentle words. She’d brought them all the way to the Tower, and they’d been able to confirm each other’s safety.

Just that had been plenty, Patrasche’s work had been plenty.

Subaru: “Any changes to Rem? If curing people is this room’s *raison d’être*[74], then I wonder if it can have that sort of intervention on how Rem is right now.…”

Ram: “Sorry, but that is a slim hope. It is neither good nor bad… But there has been no progress in her treatment. It cannot cure something which is neither a wound nor an illness. Something along those lines, no?”

Subaru: “…I guess so.”

Even so, it didn’t look like the Spirit of the Green Room was unwilling to take care of the still-sleeping Rem. It was also devoted to Ram, who watched over the slumbering Rem.

[74] More “Flench”, Subaru does use the French expression (レゾンテートル).

Subaru: “In the end, this means nothing’s changed still, doesn’t it?”

Ram: “…If we wish things to change, then we have to fulfill the aim that came up in the Tower, don’t you think?”

Subaru: “The Great Library Pleiades, its Examinations, huh?”

Their original purpose had been to get in touch with the Sage who was in Pleiades Watchtower, borrow her sagacity that had been stipulated to be omniscient, and save Rem as well as the victims of Lust and Gluttony that had been left behind in Pristella.

However, Shaula, the Sage of Pleiades Watchtower had been one in name only, and in actuality, what they had encountered was just one weird girl who mistook Subaru as Sage Flugel. Pleiades Watchtower had turned out to be the Great Library Pleiades, and the knowledge that had been touted as Shaula’s omniscience was sleeping inside countless books kept in libraries, or so had been said.

That was it, their purpose had been greatly warped, and their end-goal had shifted in an unpredictable direction.

Subaru: “I’ll get ahold of this knowledge and get Rem back—— I haven’t wavered in that purpose.”

Ram: “…Yeah. So I hope.”

Ram cast her eyes down at Subaru rotating his shoulders, nimbly stretching them. With that, she tenderly took ahold of the sleeping Rem’s hand without glancing at Subaru.

Closing one of his eyes at Ram’s attitude, Subaru pointed his finger at the ceiling.

Subaru: “I’ve decided to challenge the Examination above. What about you?”

Ram: “Don’t you think it would be too much of a cause for anxiety if no one is looking after Rem? Considering that, Ram will take on that duty. Since from the start it was for watching over Rem that I embarked along on this journey, even going as far as asking such unreasonableness from Roswaal-sama.”

Subaru: “That’s, well, yeah, I guess so. In that case I’ll entrust Rem to you.”

Ram: “I cannot really do much other than watch her, though.”

Subaru: “You watching over her has meaning you know.”

With that statement directed at Ram, who had unusually disparaged herself, Subaru looked over at Rem’s sleeping face just before he exited the room. She was in a dream such that her facial expression had vanished, and he could not say she looked either peaceful or anguished.

He stretched out his hand to her forehead which her fringe rested against, and gently touched it as if he were tickling her.

Subaru: “Well then, I’m off, I’ll see you later.”

Rem: “————”

Of course, she did not respond.

Ram understood that he had been talking to himself as well, so she did not interject callously. Satisfied with that, Subaru turned towards the room’s exit.

He could not help himself from stretching his hand out to the wall, and as he touched the ivy, he asked the Spirit “Please take care of Rem and Patrasche”, lest the Spirit forget.

Then, just before he exited the room, he suddenly stopped in his tracks.

Subaru: “By the way, you said something like you couldn’t leave Rem alone, but just now, you’d left the room empty. Why did you bother to come downstairs?”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “No way, could it be that once you heard that I’d woken up, you came to see me as quickly as you could? Please let me know if something was up…”

Ram: “Get a move on and leave.”

Subaru: “Huh? No, but, if there’s something on your mind, then won’t you tell me?”

Ram: “Hurry up and leave.”

Overwhelmed by the ghastly aura spouting up from her, Subaru was rendered anything to speak anything beyond that towards her, and thus was left with no choice but to flee from the Green Room, crestfallen.

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Subaru: “I never really get what Ram’s thinking about, but especially as of late, I haven’t understood her well.”

Emilia: “Hmm, I don’t think so, Ram is surprisingly open with that sort of stuff. I find it cute that she tries to hide that open part of hers.”

Subaru: “It’s quite rare for you to speak as if you’re her elder… Though I guess you really are her elder.”

Emilia: “Yeah, it’s a little bit like I’m her big sis. I’m older than anyone else here… Oh, wait.”

Beatrice: “Mhmmm, Betty is definitely the big sis here, in fact. That’s carved in stone and no one can paint over it, I suppose. You should all adore me, in fact.”

As soon as he had left the Green Room, he returned to everyone waiting outside, which led to this conversation.

Emilia looked a tad frustrated at having had her seat of being the oldest in the squad taken away from her, whilst Beatrice puffed out her flat chest in satisfaction. Though, to be honest, neither of them had big-sis-like demeanors.

Besides, a conversation of who the eldest was in light of their circumstances, was in fact quite a delicate matter.

Anastasia: “Hmm? Natsuki-kun, what’s up? Do ya have somethin’ ya wanna tell me?”

Subaru: “Not really. Just meant to say that there’s many faces here that don’t match their real age in appearance.”

Anastasia: “Oh? I get told I look younger than I actually am quite often. It’s a lil’ hard for me to take ‘em as a compliment, but I look down on bein’ looked down on, so dependin’ how they say it, I may accept it.”

Though Anastasia smiled with a strong look of business about her face, how she was really feeling was unclear.

Anastasia herself was just over twenty-years-old, but she looked about fourteen or fifteen. However, what Subaru had wanted to point out was not what lay on the outside, but what lay on the inside. Anastasia’s body still remained hijacked by Eridna currently.

If Eridna’s birth had been the same as Beatrice, then it would not be difficult for her to enter into the race for the oldest. However, it would be impossible for him to reveal what he had concealed up until now over such a trifling matter, so Subaru did not say anything else.

Moreover, there were other prominent candidates for the race for the oldest in the present circumstances.

Shaula: “Hey, what’s up Master? Uh huh, hm, didn’t you like the grassy smell of the Green Room? I get that. I toooo~ find that room nasty and dislikeable~.”

Subaru: “Didn’t you say there was a pungent smell coming from me too? You’re cool with mine!?”

Shaula: “Master’s a smell I’ve gotten used to. Truly. This time it’s no lie!”

Subaru: “Shut your trap.”

Keeping Shaula away from him, who had nestled up close to him and sniffed him, Subaru looked up at the floor above. Those left on the Fourth Floor would challenge the Examination above barring Rem and Ram——

Subaru: “What about you? Are you coming with us?”

Shaula: “Meeee~? Weell, I don’t particularly need to, but since it’s been so long, I do think I want to come with you. Because it gets lonely not being able to talk despite being perfectly able to. I’ve been cooped up in silence for centuries, so I want to talk and talk and taaaalk~.”

Subaru still couldn't act cold towards her with her having said such a heartrending thing with a friendly smile plastered on her face. He imagined that Emilia and Beatrice both knew that sort of loneliness all too well. His feelings towards Shaula were deeply tinged with sympathy, so he didn't really have any intentions of actively keeping her away.

Meili: "I reaaally~ like this onee-san, so I thiiink~ she should come with us."

Julius: "It is only natural that the Examiner is present if we shall take the Examination. It is just for her to accompany us to make sure that we do not commit any irregularities."

Support for that came in an unexpected form from Meili and Julius. With them having done so, it meant that the majority of them backed Shaula accompanying them.

Lastly, Subaru looked over at Anastasia, who hadn't made any comments about it, so to unite their consensus.

Receiving that gaze, Anastasia tilted her head and said "Me?",

Anastasia: "I don't think there's any meaning in just me opposin' this here, 'n I ain't got any reason to oppose it in the first place, 'n it's not particularly a problem? Besides…"

Subaru: "Besides?"

Anastasia: "That girl seems way too attached to ya Natsuki-kun, so if we take her with us, she may tell us stuff 'bout the contents of the Examination. She may inadvertently come to our side."

Shaula: "I'm sowwy, but I haven't the foggiest about the contents of the Examinations, so I'm gonna have to let you down there."

Subaru: "Jeez, did you really have to say it like that."

Anastasia laughed with a "Tahaha", and Shaula looked smug as if she'd been praised.

It was questionable whether Anastasia's anticipations boded good fortune or bad, but for now, no one seemed to have any objections to Shaula accompanying them.

Although he couldn't deny that it was a little careless, leaving her alone was also an anxiety in itself, so the only difference came from leaving the danger far away or near at hand.

Subaru: "Okay. We shall go together. It doesn't look like we can count on you, but I have high hopes of you coming up with ideas."

Shaula: "He's talking to you, lil' ankle-biter. Do your best!"

Beatrice: "He's talking to you, I suppose! What were you listening to, in fact!"

Shaula curled her lips with a look on her face of having brought up a topic that she shouldn't have. Whilst listening to Beatrice's angry yells, the group opened the door of a room opposite to the Green Room—— and when they peered inside, they found the stairs that led up there.

Subaru: "We're done with spiral staircases?"

Shaula: "The Fourth Floor Alcyone and the Third Floor Taygeta are directly connected. I don't really go up unless I got business, so I've rarely been there."

Subaru: "What's this business you refer to?"

Shaula: "It's a young maiden's secret."

Moving his gaze away from Shaula as soon as she started to show signs of her inanities, Subaru directed it over at Julius. Him and the others should have already challenged the Third Floor during his slumber.

He expected that he would be able to hear something useful out of him, but that Knight calmly shrugged his shoulders.

Julius: "I apologize for this when you have expectations, but we understood very little about it. Immediately after you climb up to the Third Floor, you'll come across the room that's referred to as an Examination, but…"

Subaru: "But?"

Julius: "What lies there is an unintelligible enigma. The honest truth is that we were unable to find any clues to solve it, and we ended up having no idea what to do."

Subaru: “An unintelligible enigma…?”

Subaru shifted his attention to the top of the stairs without getting the point in Julius’s words. The floor above was dark, and he wasn’t able to tell how it looked from below. However, that stillness made it look more sinister.

Emilia: “But, it doesn’t look like you can just enter and see what to do. Nothing really changed even when we went in and out… We were simply just given the cold shoulder.”

Beatrice: “It makes me so irritated when I think on how we were ignored, I suppose.”

It seemed like Emilia and Beatrice also agreed with Julius’s impression.

In reality, although it was said to be an Examination, none of them had been able to challenge it. His levels of wariness had just shot up, as the word “Trial” closely resembled it[75].

Subaru: “Well it can’t be helped. Nothing ventured, nothing gained—— Then let’s go?”

Emilia: “Yeah, that’s the spirit.”

Beatrice: “That’s the spirit, in fact.”

Shaula: “That’s the spirit.”

Receiving all three of their affirmations each in their own manner of speaking, Subaru took the initiative and put one of his feet on the stairs. Then, step-by-step, he headed towards the floor above—— unlike the spiral staircases from before, the number of steps to get to the Third Floor was about the same as an ordinary building.

Thus, in contrast to his preparedness, Subaru stormed straight into the Third Floor Taygeta, so much to the point that it felt he’d gotten there way too quickly.

Subaru: “I’m in a…”

[75] Altered translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “«試験», which is used to describe the Examinations in the Tower, can be translated simply as “Exam/Examination”. Meanwhile, the word «試練», as used by Petelgeuse and Echidna (among others), is translated as «Ordeal» and «Trial» respectively.”

Immediately after he entered, Subaru felt an overwhelming sense of unease. A clump of unease, or rather should he say that it was an expanse that invited nothing but unease?

——It was a white, white expanse.

Although it must be an extension of the Tower that had up until now been cylindrical in shape, what greeted Subaru after he had climbed the stairs was a strange expanse completely dyed in white in every direction.

The expanse-like vastness should not have been that different in size to the Tower so far, but neither its walls, nor the end could be seen, in this incredibly white space. Looking up above, and he could not tell where the ceiling was; looking down at his feet, only at the part where the stairs were located was a slightly ajar black. Other than that, the floor was so white that it made him scared to walk on it.

He could not tell that the floor was the floor, or he would end up being hit by an illusion that felt like he was in continuous free fall just about everywhere. The ceiling and the walls were the same—— Subaru felt like he would probably end up going crazy if he lost sight of the stairs that led downstairs here.

And, at the front of this white expanse——right in front of the stairs, there was a strange object floating up.

Subaru: “A stone slab…?”

That was the impression that slipped out from Subaru’s mouth when he looked at that object. In fact, the object was such that it could only be expressed like so.

It was a single, black slab, that had been built in the shape of a quadrilateral, and had an incredibly smooth feeling to it.

He couldn’t call it a stone slab were it not built from stone, but he had no other way of calling it considering that its nature was not metallic as well.

Were it really necessary for him to call it something else with more pizzazz, then he'd probably use the term "Monolith"[76].

The silent Monolith had acquired a strange floating power, floating up dozens of centimeters above the floor.

Or at least it should be. His eyes were thrown completely out of whack in checking how far it was off the ground due to the whiteness of the floor, and it became more and more unclear to him. However, the Monolith, floating in midair, was just there, cool as a cucumber.

It was roughly the same height as Subaru, and its width was about the size of two people lined up together—— if he had to put it as something similar in size, then the impression he got was much like that of a floating tatami.

Subaru: "What the heck is this strange thing?"

Julius: "If I were to try and put it into different words, I would say this is the contrivance that stuck out this enigma before us."

Julius glared at the Monolith, standing beside Subaru, whose awareness had been gripped by this strange spectacle.

Julius's face looked sterner than usual, as if he had been already made to experience great hardship by the Monolith many times over. The rest of them had by now made it up to the Third Floor, and were huddled together in an effort to ward off the indistinct atmosphere present inside of the white expanse.

Subaru: "This isn't a room I want to stay long in."

Julius: "That I agree. If we stay here too long, it is quite probable that we will lose our sense of balance. And if you end up running towards the stairs and your feet slip, I imagine your life could end up being cut short, wouldn't you think?"

[76] Given that this is Engrish (モノリス), it might just be a Space Odyssey reference. Either way, at the very least it may be just a loanword.

Anastasia: “Yoohoo, Julius. Stop with the unnecessary prattle.”

Anastasia puffed out her cheeks in protest at Julius’s prattle. It looked like she’d slipped on the way back before, which was what Julius had been referring to.

However, Subaru had no intention of laughing at that mishap. In actual fact, this room had been clearly made with the goal of putting people’s senses out of whack. The room seemed like it embodied the wickedness of the nature of the person who’d made it.

Subaru: “So, what should we do about the main mystery?”

Beatrice: “You should touch that slab, in fact. The Examination begins once you do, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Should I really touch the Monolith?”

Julius: “Monolith? That’s a name that fits quite well with its mysteriousness. Let’s call it like that from now on.”

Subaru stepped away from Julius, who was in admiration of that strangeness, and moved forward on their behalf. Since no one stopped him, he walked all the way over to the Monolith.

He had expected the Monolith to let off a strange, ominous feeling when he approached—— but it wasn’t like that, it was pretty much just a plain old slab of stone. Other than the fact it was floating. Once he thought of it like a tatami floating about, he felt the fear he’d had at first fade just a little.

Subaru: “Anyways, so I’ll go ahead and touch it? Can I get a countdown?”

Emilia: “Ah, right, I’d like to do it. Three, two, one…”

Subaru: “So damn quick! I got you!”

Emilia raised her hand up and volunteered to Subaru’s appeal; then her countdown began. As she counted down, Subaru panicked and turned around to face the Monolith. And then,

Emilia: “Zero——!”

Subaru touched the Monolith at the same time she counted zero—— the next moment, the surface of the black slab glowed from the inside. Just as it did, the scene in front of his eyes grew blurred.

No, it was not exactly blurred.

The Monolith which Subaru had touched began to grow in numbers, whilst glowing with a black radiance.

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by Norvak (source)

The Monolith shot out replicated Monolith after Monolith from its back, all the while, its surface shined. They were all hurled across the room at incredible velocity, scattered in strange positions, all floating.

Countless Monoliths had been strewn out across the white expanse, and Subaru had been taken by surprise by that change. Then, passing through the awestruck Subaru's eardrums—— straight to his brain, a voice echoed.

???: "——Touch the brightest of the Hero destroyed by Shaula."

Subaru: "——Hk!?"

Subaru jerked his hand away from the Monolith in surprise upon hearing that voice ring out so abruptly. And, as he staggered back, someone propped his back up from behind.

He turned around to look at them. There, he found Julius's face.

Julius touched his fringe with his left hand as he propped Subaru up with his right, and said,

Julius: "Well look at this. Our first surprise, can I count on you sympathizing with it, I wonder?"

Subaru: "What an assholish thing to say——!!"

Subaru's protests only made Julius's sardonic smile grow deeper.

In any case, the Examination had genuinely started now.

The Great Library Pleiades, the Examination of the Third Floor Taygeta.

Time-limit, no restrictions. Number of attempts, no restrictions. Challengers, no restrictions.

——Examination, start.

Arc 6 Chapter 22 – The Asterism of the White Starry Sky

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 2 “A White Sky Asterism”, Part 2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

After he untangled himself from Julius, and stood unaided, he turned to face the Examination.

In front of Subaru’s eyes, the figures of countless replica Monoliths had spread out across the white expanse, with the Monolith he’d touched as the center. To be honest, there were so many of them that he would get sick and tired were he to count them.

Subaru: “This would be the Examination you meant… right, Shaula?”

Shaula: “Looks like it, right? I wanna see Master flaunt his forte!”

Subaru: “Don’t start saying stuff like a band would at a drinking party…”

He would not know since he had never been to one, but that was probably how things went there.

Subaru looked around the room behind Shaula, who had cheered him on with her easy-going manner. The floor was still enveloped in white, with everything from their ability to tell distance to their ability to tell height going haywire.

The only change that stood out were the Monoliths dotted about the place, but those too were not particularly different from the first one. There seemed to be a bit of a difference in size between them, but other than that, they were the same in that they all floated in midair and were made of a strange material.

Subaru: “Speaking of other stuff that we were given as a clue, there’s still that thing from before.”

What he recalled was the voice that had echoed inside his brain upon touching the Monolith.

???: "——Touch the brightest of the Hero destroyed by Shaula."

The sound had not come through his eardrums, but rather it had been whispered straight to his brain inside his skull; closer to that. The voice he had heard was no sound, so the general concept of it being someone's voice could not be applied here.

If he were to put it in other words, it was like the words had been jammed into his brain like a sentence that he had thought of. There was no sound in his thoughts. Thus, who the voice belonged to was incomprehensible. If anything, it was his own.

Subaru: "That voice which could be heard was the Examination's question, you reckon? If that's the case…"

Julius: "Subaru, I apologize for interrupting while you are pondering, but there are a few important things I have to say. I do not think it would hurt to go ahead only after hearing those."

The practical joker from before, Julius, sent those words Subaru's way while the latter was racking his mind. Near the stairs which led downwards, Emilia and the rest of them were circled around the Monolith, standing still. Every one of them looked puzzled. Subaru shrugged his shoulders in appreciation of Julius, who was beckoning them to his side, and with an "Oh?",

Subaru: "Is that so? All of you challenged it before whilst I was sleeping. Did you make any progress?"

Julius: "I guess I really cannot dub it progress. Anyways. Subaru, please try and touch the stone slab… I mean, the Monolith right here."

Subaru: "Does doing this please you that much? Well, sure whatever…"

Subaru narrowed his eyes at Julius, who had stuck to referring to it as a Monolith, and walked over to the Monolith on his right hand side. The slab was one of the replicas of the original Monolith. As he got closer, he could see that this one was just a little smaller than the original.

Subaru: "What if it's a trap, where the moment I touch it my arm gets swallowed up?"

Beatrice: "It's okay, in fact. If something like that happened, Betty would become your right arm for the rest of your life, I suppose."

Emilia: “Ah, then I’d become Subaru’s left hand. You can rest assured.”

Subaru: “Both of my arms would be gone if we suppose that though!”

Thanks to Beatrice and Emilia’s reassuring pledges, Subaru summoned his courage and stretched his hand out towards the Monolith. The act of touching it in itself was not something that worried him.

So long as his companions had recommended him to do this, and did not attempt to stop him, he had no reason to doubt his safety. The issue was simply the chance that they were concealing the truth, as with the Monolith’s self-replication——

Subaru: “Oh?”

Still full of anxiety, as soon as his fingertips brushed against the Monolith, the black stone slab shone so brightly that it almost scorched his eyes. In fact, its radiance had caused Subaru to hold his breath and immediately cover his face with his arm.

Then, after the light faded away, what remained in front of Subaru’s eyes was——

Subaru: “Huh? Where did the Monolith go?”

Shaula: “Hehehe, behind youuu~ Master.”

Subaru: “Behind me…?”

After that flash of light, Subaru confirmed that the Monolith that should have been in front of him had disappeared. Surprised by what had happened, he turned to look behind him at Shaula who had nonsensically shouted out in triumph.

When he turned around, in front of the stairs—— in other words, at the place where the original Monolith had stood, the first Monolith stood alone. The rest of them had disappeared from the room entirely.

Subaru: “So, in other words… this means?”

Julius: “That everything went back to its original state. To put it shortly, it looks like the Examination has deemed it a failure. Naturally.…”

Stepping away from the dejected Subaru's side, Julius carelessly approached the original Monolith. And then, immediately after he stretched out his hand and touched its surface, that voice echoed out through his mind——

???: "——Touch the brightest of the Hero destroyed by Shaula."

Once again, in sync with the challenge posed to them, Monolith after Monolith were replicated from the original and scattered all around the room with the same momentum as before. The Examination was distributed around therefrom.

In other words, they could call this a Retry.

Subaru: "I see. It must mean we can think as much as we want until we find an answer."

Julius: "That is our guess right now. There happens to be this Monolith, but I can say that even when we went around touching Monoliths at random… We were unable to find an answer."

Subaru: "Ah, so you've already tried bruteforcing it?"

Subaru broke down Julius's mild manner of speaking to the bread and bones of it. Emilia and Meili, who had heard that explanation, were patting their heads with what seemed to be a look of embarrassment about them.

Just attempting to touch and check every single one of them, certainly it looked like they had tried to carry out that tactic. Nevertheless, it did not seem that it had done the trick.

Subaru: "It's an Examination after all. It means we have to solve the problem and answer it."

Julius: "It looks like our Examiner does not appreciate answers given out at random."

Subaru: "Yeah, seems so. So like a Sensei who doesn't give you credit unless you write down all of your formulas, and doesn't allow you to just put the answers in the test's answer column. The anti-cheating measures sure do appear quickly though."

Reaching an answer without showing how it had been derived could only come as a result of cheating or a hunch. Often times, till primary school, he would come across problems which he would find answers

to using his hunches, but the main point to mathematics was to learn how to derive the problem, not to regurgitate the problem willy-nilly on the spot.

One time during primary school, he had been marked down for the lack of clarity in his working out. He remembered how resentful he'd been about it, but——

Subaru: "After all this time, it looks like my Sensei was right…"

Anastasia: "I'm sorry to butt in when you're still absorbed in yer thoughts, Natsuki-kun, but rather yer turn ain't from here. Come on, snap back to reality, snap back."

Subaru: "Huh, ah, oh, my bad. But, what do you mean by «my turn»?"

Anastasia beckoned Subaru, his eyes glazed over, back to the real world, and then clapped her hand on his back. As Subaru tilted his head at her appeal, everyone looked around at each other, and broke into mutters.

What they were saying was the same thing, so combining it and paraphrasing it into other words—— "It's down to Subaru to find out who the Hero destroyed by Shaula is".

Emilia: "We challenged the Examination many times over until Subaru woke up. However, that girl wouldn't even tell us whether or not she was Shaula when we did."

Beatrice: "As far as Betty and the others were concerned, Shaula was the Sage, in fact. We thought they were the person on the drawing engraved on the silver coin, so we didn't connect this woman with Shaula, I suppose."

Those were Emilia and Beatrice's replies, both of whom had not been able to hear Shaula's story until then.

Ever since Subaru had woken up, he had seen Shaula communicate with him with an air of over-familiarity that was way off the marks of typical friendliness, and because of that it was hard to believe for him that she had refused to say anything to them. However, her not telling them anything more could not be helped, since she had kept her mouth shut towards those in the Tower.

Having said that though, Subaru was still worried.

Even if Shaula had had her tongue unsealed since then, and had become able to talk about that——

Subaru: “I guess it doesn’t hurt to ask. Hey, Shaula. If you know anything, please tell me everything about the Hero you destroyed.”

Shaula: “Leave this to me. Remembering stuff like each of the names of the guys I’ve killed is second class work… For a first-class individual like meeee~, I don’t remember past the one-hundred mark.”

Subaru: “Of course you’d say that!”

Shaula gave him a thumbs-up and then winked. Receiving that vigorous response, Subaru slapped his knee.

Just as he had expected and feared, her reply was an air-headed Shaula-like one.

He had suspected that was likely going to happen with how she had acted and talked till now. There was the chance that she, who would seemingly know the answer to “the Hero that Shaula destroyed”, did not remember it anywhere in her head.

Julius: “However, we shall not make any progress if we end it with that. Miss Shaula, do you really not remember anything? Even if it is a tiny little detail, it does not matter.”

Shaula: “That’s easier said than done. I juuuust~ *Jigoku no Sogeki* everyone who comes near to the Tower, and their corpses end up being cleaned up by the Witchbeasts outside.”

Anastasia: “Okay, but isn’t it strange? Could it be an Examination to see whether we can reveal the Tower’s knowledge in the first place? It’d be a strange sequence of events for it to require us to show somethin’ that happened after Shaula-san’s tenure in protectin’ the Tower started.”

Shaula pouted, saying she had no clue whatsoever, but Anastasia evidenced the out of place feeling in what she had stated. Everyone other than Shaula agreed with her opinion with an “I see”.

For sure, it was difficult to imagine that the problem posed inside the Tower came about after her tenure in the Tower had started. Then, naturally, that meant the period of time in which “Shaula had destroyed the Hero” came before the Tower’s construction.

Beatrice: “In other words, that means it’s from before you started firing at people at random, in fact. Come on, remember, I suppose. It’s like all of your nourishment ended up just in your buttocks and breasts, so your memory has become poor, in fact.”

Shaula: “This appearance was chosen by my Mother~. Butbut, even if you say «Remember», it’s not gonna come out, honestly. Before the Tower was built, right?”

Emilia: “Yeah, that’s right. Before the Tower was built. During that time, do you happen to know of anyone that you kille… I mean destroyed?”

Gathered near the stairway with Shaula as the center, they desperately tried to jog her memories. However, Shaula, basking in everyone’s expectations, gave no signs that they had been successful, and she groaned with an “Ahiiin”.

Subaru: “Is it true or not that you’ve been around since four-hundred-years ago? If I name a bunch of the noteworthy people around that time, you wouldn’t happen to have killed two or three of them, would you?”

Shaula: “Master, are you thinking that about meeee~? I’m a maiden who likes to dabble with flowers you know.”

Subaru: “That’s no maiden, more like a caterpillar.”

Emilia: “Subaru, I think your way of speaking just now was ever so rude. If she doesn’t want to remember, then don’t push her and force her to…”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, your kindness is your super-virtue, your best feature, but this woman is the type where the more you pamper her, the more useless she becomes, don’t you think!? I can tell! Because I’m the same!”

Emilia had firmly puffed out her chest and declared that. But, it was not that Shaula was unable to remember because she wished not to in the first place, but rather that her memory was so poor that she just was incapable of doing so.

The topic was one which he wanted to handle delicately, since one of his members had a bunch of difficult problems in regards to memories, but it was a different matter when it came to Shaula.

Subaru: “Practically, it’ll be no problem if I fire off some random names, right? I don’t know how one of them striking the answer would react with the Monoliths, though.”

Anastasia: “It’s definitely gotta be as Natsuki-kun says. I wonder tho’, even if we find out the answer, how can we then touch the brightest?”

Considering that the Monolith he’d touched had disappeared, and the Examination seemed to have adjudicated them as having messed up, he could predict that their answer’s final form would probably be to “Touch the correct Monolith”.

The issue then was how they would find the correct Monolith. He did not get the feeling like it would become clear even if they chipped away at Shaula’s memories, one could say.

Meili: “Buuut~, even if we think forever, we won’t make any progress, riiight~? Since naked onee-san is pretty cooperatiiive~, I thiiink~ we might as well ask her.”

Still holding onto Shaula’s bare shoulders, Meili butted in between the adults who were stumbling over what to do. She looked at the group of Monoliths with a look of boredom on her face as she fiddled about with Shaula’s scorpiontail.

Meili: “There’s nooo~ ickle Witchbeasties around, there’s nooo~ progress, and it’s really not fun heeere~. Speed things up, I wanna go back to the mansiooon~.”

Everyone: “————”

Everyone was at a loss for words at the words which Meili had uttered. Following straight after that, Meili said “What is iiit~?”, as Subaru patted her head.

Meili: “What is it I wooonder~?”

Subaru: “Nothing, I just think it’s as you say. You’re right. This place is sandy as hell, and on top of that, there’s a bunch of scary Witchbeasts prowling about outside. We’ll quickly take care of things here, settle all our problems… wake up Rem, retrieve a means to save the people in need, and then we shall skedaddle out of here.”

Treading around things with anxiety before attempting them was a waste of valuable time.

It felt to him like the Examination had been set up by someone rather ill-natured and that he was playing right into their hands.

Shaula: “Master, Master. You do know that there’s an easy-to-stroke head right next to that lil’ ankle-biter.”

Subaru: “I said this already. You’re the same as me in that you’re the type which when pampered falls unendingly into corruption. That’s why from here on out we’re doing this the Spartan way. Hurry the hell up and remember.”

Shaula: “Do I have toooo~?”

Puffing her cheeks out in dissatisfaction, Shaula seemed to be in full-pout. However, she would be easy to handle, since after a few dozen seconds she would start humming with a face like she’d forgotten.

Julius: “Well then, our young lady requests it too. Shall we try and get on with testing out the possibilities we have in front of us without dithering about?”

Anastasia: “Mhm, that’s probably a good idea. It’s relievin’ that it’s okay even if we fail a buncha’ times. In most cases in life, things are decided in just a single bout… So, this is quite a generous problem don’t’cha think?”

Although Meili had set things off in motion, Julius and Anastasia had also come into agreement with her. Thus, it was time to make her remember “The Hero destroyed and forgotten by Shaula”, once again.

Subaru: “For now let’s go with a name that you remember… Yeah. Ah, how about Reid? That dude was the First Sword Saint, you killed him, didn’t you?”

Shaula: “AIIIIIIIIIIIIIEEEEEE!!”

Meili: “GYAAAA!”

Subaru: “Third Base Cleanup[77]!”

[77] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “A baseball reference. Seems to be a reference to this manga, the title of which was translated as Third Base Fourth.”

Straight after he'd nonchalantly pulled out that name, Shaula let out a high-pitched shriek and leapt backwards. Subaru performed a diving catch on Meili, who had been dropped, unable to withstand that injection of momentum.

After he safely brought Meili back to ground, Shaula, who had jumped up and fled far away into the room, had gotten smaller in view.

Subaru: "Hey! I'm sorry! I don't really know why you're acting like that, but get back here!"

Shaula: "P-please don't say such scary stuff. Master's a real mean guy. The absolute worst. A maiden's distress. A liability issue."

Even though she spoke frivolously, Shaula's voice as she skulked back was shaking feebly. She sure did act tough, but she was not all that. Unmistakably, fear and dread had caused her to react like that.

Naturally, the reason behind her fear could only be but one.

Subaru: "Huh, was the First Sword Saint such a scary person?"

Julius: "How foolish. Reinhard, Wilhelm-sama and such are esteemed individuals worthy of the forefather of the Astrea family. He definitely was not just skilled with the sword, but a man of character as well. Certainly, there are some parts sprinkled into the anecdotes left behind as rumors that indicate that he was rather strong-willed, which do not overlap with Reinhard and the rest, but… if it truly is not like such, then would that not mean that the history of the Astrea Family has been twisted till this current generation?"

Subaru: "Not really, but when you unravel history, the viewpoint of prominent statesmen also changes, and you'll find that Japanese History is sufficiently cruel too. If we compare it to that, then I mean we can't really start speaking about dogmas here…"

Julius: "Dear goodness, let's not delve into this sort of talk. It is alright. We can get a clarification to the story if we get her to talk, as she is a living witness. Come now, let's listen to her."

Julius started to ramble on with tremendous vigor at Subaru, who had hazarded a guess at Reid's temperament from Shaula's reaction. And to make matters worse, he had handled things by dismissing Subaru, who had attempted to defend his own point, with a laugh.

After so long, Subaru could once again see a glimpse of the figure of that gaudy Knight he had witnessed at the onset of the Royal Selection. He now knew that his attitude back then had been down to him playing the villain. Though, whenever he saw him like this, he sure did get the impression that he still was a bit of a villain, much like when they first met.

In any case,

Julius: "Your impressions regarding the First Sword Saint, Reid Astrea. Miss Shaula, I would like you to tell us your candid impression of him."

Shaula: "He was human garbage."

Julius: "I would like you to tell us your candid impression of him."

Subaru: "Don't pretend like she didn't say anything!!"

Subaru shoved Julius's shoulder, who had tried to ignore that inconvenient tidbit, and made him face the facts. Pointing his finger at Shaula, who had a troubled look on her face, Subaru continued.

Subaru: "Hey, listen up. The truth about the history you wanted to know about is right here. She's a living witness to it. Go on, tell me as many anecdotes about Reid Astrea as you like, of that magnanimous man of character skilled in the sword."

Julius: "…Those who hold exceptional talent end up having confidence in themselves, more or less. That should not be chastised, rather, it should be something you take pride in. If you end up becoming the greatest swordsman recorded in history, even acting like such is, yeah, when you take into account how things were back then, it would be suitable——"

Subaru: "It's the first time I've seen you so desperate."

Julius too became flustered as if he were considering just how unconvincing he sounded.

Setting Julius aside, who had been betrayed by the history which he ever so loved, Shaula's "Truth of Reid Astrea" was pouring out of her without an end in sight.

Shaula: "Well, anyways, he was a nasty guy. His personality was like that of an unruly brat's in adult-form, and he loved to bully the weak. Or I guess if we look at it from that garbage's point of view, almost all of his opponents were weak, so he'd be bullying the weak no matter who he fought against. He did that a lot to meee~ too."

Emilia: "But, he was able to keep doing that to you even though you're so strong? Ah, since it happened over four-hundred years ago, you must've still been small then too?"

Shaula: "I'veee~ been like this ever since I was born. So, between now and back then, I'veee~ not changed, however… That thing was just out of the ordinary. A total piece of shit."

Garbage, piece of shit, the Hero of yore had been harshly evaluated as such.

The darkness was not vanishing from Shaula's attitude, as if many hateful memories had come flooding back to her. It was the same as when a person who had been bullied recalled what the bully had done to them.

Shaula: "You should always keep that piece of shit in mind. Even if the bully forgets, the one bullied absolutely never will, and that's a fact…"

Subaru: "I'm not really surprised since there's a precedent in Reinhard, but it'd take quite a monster to knock you down a few pegs, and Reid Astrea's one too."

Shaula: "He really was the worst. But, I was able to get him to use both hands once every ten times we fought."

Subaru: "…I see."

He could only answer with that. Had she set her goals high or low in making him use both of his hands once every ten times, and not to gain victory once every ten times?

Subaru felt like he would not be able to make Reinhard use both his hands even once every hundred times, so he could admit that her putting up a fight like that had been plenty enough.

Subaru: “Well, we can put off asking about Reid. It’s pretty pointless for us to ask if you didn’t destroy him.”

Julius: “——. ————I agree. There’s other things we ought to prioritize right now.”

Subaru: “Didn’t you waste time doing that just now?”

Subaru could not tell whether he had a scholarly interest in it or a curiosity spurred from a simple hobby, but he judged that for now, perhaps Julius would not be of any use.

Although he felt sorry for Julius, who had gotten his illusions shattered, unfortunately for him, Subaru had no reason to care about Reinhard’s ancestor right now. To begin with, Reinhard himself was already more than plenty enough amazing no matter how amazing his bloodline was. At least considering his father’s nature, he was sure that Reinhard was much better off.

Subaru: “Then, let’s leave all speculation about who the Hero is to the guy who knows best.”

Julius: “Gotcha. I shall humbly accept.”

Subaru: “I still wasn’t talking about you, but sure. Go for it. Beako, *tsuitekunasai*[78].”

Beatrice: “Gotcha, in fact.”

He left the task to Julius since he was motivated to do it. And getting Beatrice to assist him as a helper, who boasted four-hundred years of knowledge, was ideal.

Emilia: “Then what shall we do?”

Subaru: “We’ll take a closer look at the surroundings.”

He would leave the Hero-related stuff to Julius and Beatrice, who would remain by Shaula, and he wanted to take a look at the arrangement issue in the meantime.

[78] Engrish flip. Means “follow (imperative)” (付いてくなさい), originally “フォロー” (follow).

Namely, how the replicated Monoliths were arranged—— If there was some significance to their uneven arrangement, then taking the time to search for the pattern behind it probably would not be a waste.

Subaru: “First of all, the first one… is in front of the stairs.”

Emilia: “It’s the Monolith that hands out the question, right?”

The Monoliths were not lined up in a narrow enough space to the extent that they had to be careful not to bump into them; nevertheless, Subaru took Anastasia and Emilia and looked around the Monoliths inside the room.

There was a surprising difference in size between the scattered Monoliths on second look. However, there was not a single one of them that was as large as the series of original Monoliths, the figures of countless Monoliths which were one or two times smaller were scattered about.

Subaru: “At first glance… I guess there’s about seven or eight Monoliths that are about the same size as the first Monolith?”

Emilia: “I guess so? Yeah, I think so too. I think the ones that are reaaally faraway are all quite small. We’ll end up restarting things if we touch those too, though.”

Subaru: “From the way you’re talking about it, it looks like you’ve done that before… Ah, sorry. Never mind about that.”

Seeing sadness build up in Emilia’s eyes, Subaru caught himself before he said too much. Returning back in front of the first Monolith, Subaru turned to face the two girls and plunged into thought.

Subaru: “Touch the brightest of the Hero destroyed by Shaula… I feel like it’s trying to say something cool.”

Anastasia: “I guess it must be sayin’ somethin’ abstract. Unfortunately, we can’t overlook the question when we take into account what comes out of relyin’ on Shaula-san’s memory.”

Subaru: “Well, I suppose so.”

Although it was labelled as an Examination, in reality the path to the answer depended on relying on others—— but it would be unfair to rely on someone who had been originally been assigned to be the Tower's keeper.

Subaru and the others had not expected friendly contact upon making it to the Tower—— However, they ended up arriving without coming to blows with Shaula; if it had not ended up like that, they would have fallen into a quagmire of massacre. Even if they had successfully made it into the Tower in that case, they likely would not have been able to defeat Shaula.

Emilia: "If we do that, passing the Examination is going to be forever impossible, right?"

Subaru: "That's correct if you're saying they have no intention of letting us solve the Examination. They could put a strong guardian as a defense mechanism, and worse, were we to kill said guardian, they could put a terrible barrier that would not let us pass…"

Emilia: "But, Subaru, you don't think that… You think it's different to that?"

Subaru: "Mhmhm."

Emilia turned her eyes in anticipation towards Subaru, who had touched on this issue of security. Receiving her gaze, Subaru confirmed her thoughts with a chuckle.

Those eyes were Subaru's weakness. Subaru grew weak whenever Emilia and Beatrice gave him those looks. Rem, Garfiel and Otto would occasionally look at him like that too. Coupled with Petra, that made far too many. The only ones who did not regard him in such a way were Patrasche and Ram.

Subaru: "Ahh, it somehow feels like I could see a trend."

Emilia: "——?"

Subaru: "It's nothing, just talking to myself."

Subaru's bluff would not have worked against those who could see through him. Of course, he was bailed out thanks to Emilia not being one of those who would question him about it.

Anyways, putting that aside and going back to the problem of the format of the Examination——

Subaru: “Exceptions aside, fundamentally the problem was constructed with the assumption that it can be solved. If they really wanted to hide things properly, it’d be smarter not to leave them somewhere where there’s a chance of finding them.”

Anastasia: “But, Natsuki-kun, you’ve eyeballed this place as not bein’ like that?”

Subaru: “What was it that the keeper of this place, Shaula, said? She said this is a Great Library where you can get all the knowledge you desire. I don’t think Shaula herself could come up with such a fancy-looking phrase, so I think she’s splurging out words that were told to her by someone else. Meaning that Flugel, who built this Library and entrusted it to Shaula, intended for it to be used.”

The more he unraveled the possibilities, the more unnatural the current situation became to him.

The creator of this Great Library Pleiades must have taken steps to set it up so that the building fulfilled its purpose. For that reason, he had left behind the Examinations and Shaula here as a means to screen people.

Subaru: “Does this mean that no one but those who get along well with Shaula can use it to begin with?”

Emilia: “But Shaula said that she attacked everyone who approached the Tower, right?”

Yeah, that was right.

The command that had been given to Shaula was to eliminate anyone who approached the Tower without any exceptions, and Subaru and the others coming into friendly contact with Shaula had just been a stroke of luck. If he recklessly concluded that people would not get the qualifications to challenge the Tower unless they abounded in fortuity, then,

Anastasia: “So what ya need is strength, luck, ‘n charm so that you’re able to make friends with Shaula-san? I think our lineup’s pretty unfit for that challenge.”

Subaru: “…It sure is.”

Had they been defeated by Shaula, killed by her, or been unable to get her to cooperate with them, then they would have lost the qualifications to challenge the Great Library Pleiades——

Although it was irrational to think so, if he listed all the conditions up till now, he could only come to that conclusion.

However, Subaru could not help but have a bad feeling in just accepting that. And then,

Emilia: “Hey. Heeey~.”

Subaru: “Emilia?”

Emilia: “I’m feeling reaaally uneasy. I’ve got a real bad feeling in and around my chest.”

Emilia placed her hand to the pit of her stomach and anxiously spilled that out. As he was about to draw his eyes to that, Subaru restrained himself before he ogled her pale skin.

Clearing his throat, he frowned at Emilia and said, “A bad feeling?”

Subaru: “Huh, is something on your mind?”

Emilia: “To tell you the truth, there is. But, this may have nothing to do with everything, and even if I say it out loud, I think only you would understand me…”

Subaru: “I think I’d like you to say whatever’s on your mind right now, so you can say it to me. My thoughts aren’t necessarily correct, and it’s honestly a good thing to think about things from multiple different angles.”

Emilia: “Really?”

Having been immersed in her thoughts about what she was holding back, Emilia’s face brightened a little as she heard his words. Then she continued speaking saying “In that case,.”

Emilia: “When you touched the Monolith, you guys could hear a voice inside of your head, right?”

Anastasia: “Yeah. It’s an uncanny contraption, but I wonder what the heck it is.”

Emilia: “That voice… Isn’t it similar to the one back at the Sanctuary’s Trials?”

Subaru & Anastasia: “————”

Subaru and Anastasia both kept their silence when they heard Emilia's suggestion. However, even if both of them had ended up staying silent, the reason why they had done so was different.

Anastasia had plunged into silence because she had no clue what those words meant, but Subaru's silence had been because he had been taken by surprise, and because he understood her words.

The Trials—— those had taken place at the Tomb of the Witch Echidna, an existence present in the Sanctuary.

Those mystifying phenomena that made one confront their past and confront differing presents; Subaru did not know the full details as he retired halfway through, but according to Echidna back at the Tomb, there had been a Third Trial too, which Emilia had overcome.

No, the details and hardships of those Trials were not what was important here.

What was important was that that refrain, which had informed them about the details of the Examination using their own voice, was pretty much the same as when they had challenged the Trials.

Subaru: "Now that you mention it, you're right. Why did that slip out of my mind… I guess because they're bad memories?"

Emilia: "Subaru, that's because you reaaally dislike Echidna, no?"

Anastasia: "——Hk."

Subaru: "Once you go through an experience where a savior turns out to actually be the one pulling the strings behind the scenes, you'll be like me too!"

Ever since Sanctuary, Emilia and Subaru had spoken about the Witches only once or twice. Once he touched on the subject of the Trials, Emilia preferred to skirt around it, so he had not pursued the topic too much.

The point that they both shared in common, was that they thought "Echidna is an ill-natured fiend". Emilia sugarcoated it more when speaking, but Subaru spoke about her as it was.

Anastasia: "Why, ya freaked me out 'cause ya mentioned Echidna's name."

Emilia: “Ah, I see. Anastasia’s Spirit is called Echidna too… She does speak in a reaaally similar manner, right? ‘Tis strange.”

Subaru: “Yeah, it’s strange, but let’s settle this another time, alright? So, it’s similar to the Trial…”

When he’d heard the word “Examination” mentioned, he had thought it similar to “Trial”[79].

With even the way they began as a part that resembled the Trials, probably one part of the system, or perhaps a great part of it, resembled the one at the Tomb.

Subaru: “Come to think of it, the Trials too were practically unlimited in how much you could challenge it.”

Emilia: “And what’s more, about the Examinations, there’s the Third, the Second and the First Floor, totaling three here too, right?”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru and Emilia looked at each other as if they were saying “Yeah, it’s definitely like that”.

The Sage’s name, and a period of time of four-hundred years. Looking back on it, it felt inevitable that history, that the epoch of those Witches, overlapped with it.

Emilia: “Yeah, I’m sorry though. Even if we know that much, it still doesn’t bring us any closer to the answer, huh.”

Having thought all the way up to there, Emilia cut her story short with a flustered look on her face.

Just as Emilia had concluded, even if there was a chance that this place had some relationship to the Tomb, it still had nothing to do with the Examination of Taygeta.

The name of the “Hero who was destroyed by Shaula” was still something that they had to rely on Shaula for——

[79] “試験”, translated as “Examination(s)”, and “試練”, translated as “Trial(s)”, have the first character in common.

Subaru: "…Actually, isn't it not like that?"

Emilia: "Subaru?"

Subaru: "If we presume this place is something that's supposed to be solvable, then it can't be captured unless we deal with Shaula. Then there's a mistake here in the first place?"

This was the Tower of the Sage, and that had been the Tomb of the Witch.

Both of these Examiners shared in the same wicked disposition, but if that wasn't only what they had in common, they had a conceivable chance to overcome them.

The Witch had tested people out in her Trials, but she did not present them any hardships that could not produce results.

Then, if the Sage tested people in his Examinations, then he should not give them any hardships that could not produce results.

Subaru: "A chance for us to be able to capture the Tower without needing Shaula…"

Anastasia: "Natsuki-kun, what did'cha think of…"

Emilia: "Shhh."

Plunging into his thoughts, Subaru placed his hand on his chin, closed one of his eyes and sunk into speculation. As he did so, Emilia waved her hand and silenced Anastasia, who had seen a ray of hope glimmering in what was occurring and spoken up.

Emilia put her finger to her lips and made a shushing gesture at her telling her to stay quiet, and after that, she turned her head back to look at Subaru. Her amethyst eyes sparkled with anticipation.

Not taking any notice of Emilia's anticipation, Subaru's head spun in thought.

In this Examination, Shaula's presence was not important. Perhaps there was even a chance that those challenging the Tower would destroy Shaula were she to attack them. If he presumed that they still did not even know Shaula's name——

Subaru: “Even if we didn’t know that Shaula is Shaula, if we assume a Shaula was involved…”

Emilia & Anastasia: “————”

Subaru: “We mistakenly believed that Flugel’s achievement had been Shaula’s. The Sage’s achievement was that he sealed the Witch with the help of the First Sword Saint and the Divine Dragon. However, the Witch of Envy isn’t something that we’d ever call something like a Hero, nor was she ever destroyed.”

He cut out that possibility as being an incorrect hypothesis right here.

Maybe there’d been another heroic tale which the Sage Flugel had pushed onto Shaula that he just was unaware of. However, it did not make any sense that Beatrice and Julius would not recall something like that—— An inevitable possibility floated up in his mind.

Subaru: “Even if we didn’t know that Shaula is Shaula, if we assume a Shaula was involved… That’s it.”

He once again repeated what he had said.

That didn’t mean his thoughts were going around in circles. It was the opposite. He’d cut out one of the possibilities, and another one had surfaced. And, what that meant was——

Subaru: “Beako! Come here for a sec!”

Following the possibility that had struck him, Subaru lifted his face up and called Beatrice over.

Julius was trying everything he could to try and pry open the lid on Shaula’s memories. Next to him, Beatrice sprung up upon hearing Subaru’s voice that indicated he’d managed to find something. She rushed over to him, and said,

Beatrice: “That face is Betty’s favorite Subaru face, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Shouldn’t all of them be your favorite?”

Beatrice: “This one especially, in fact.”

Beatrice said that without any traces of embarrassment to her, and Subaru stretched out his hand over to her as she stood in front of him. Beatrice took his hand and looked at him with her round blue eyes.

Her eyes were asking, “What do you want me to do?”. Thus, Subaru nodded, and said,

Subaru: “It’s quite simple—— I’d like to jump a bit higher with Murak.”

Beatrice: “…Don’t tell me you’re going to say you’ve given up, so you want to break the ceiling and go up that way, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Don’t be so shocked. Of course not. I just want to look down on the Monoliths from above.”

Emilia: “Look down on the Monoliths…”

Behind him, Emilia turned around to look at the Monoliths and muttered that out.

Even if she was no cognizant of what he expected to get from it, Beatrice showed no intent of wanting to ask anything beyond that. She let out a small sigh and gripped his hand more tightly,

Beatrice: “Murak, in fact.”

Pale, light purple waves faintly wrapped themselves around Subaru’s body following her incantation.

Murak was magic which kept the effects of gravity at bay and made a person far more agile. Just by jumping lightly he would be able to float up by about one meter, and if he kicked off from the floor with all his strength, then——

Subaru: “Up we go!”

Still holding Beatrice’s hand, Subaru leapt up towards the top of the tall room. Although he risen some six or seven meters, his body did not crash into the ceiling as he had expected.

The layer had expanded as if there had been no ceiling at all inside of this endless white expanse. Thus, Subaru was able to look down on the entire room from above.

Subaru: “——It’s as I thought.”

Beatrice: “Were you able to find what you were looking for, I suppose?”

Subaru: “Of course. This place is the absolute worst.”

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by Setowi (source)

Subaru frowned and nodded seeing Beatrice's gaze, who had heard his mutter wrapped inside of his arms.

The two of them turned towards the ground and dropped down; their lightness of body that had helped them leap up also helped grace their landing. They landed without any issue, and he lowered Beatrice, who he had been princess-carrying, down to the floor,

Subaru: "I know the name of the Hero."

Emilia: "Really!?"

Subaru said that with conviction to Emilia, who had seen him muse about it and then leap up. Emilia reacted in surprise to his words, and Anastasia rounded her eyes as well.

Hearing them speak, Julius and the others with him had been captivated by their talk and gathered over to where Subaru and the others were.

Meili: "Onii-san figured it ouuut~?"

Subaru: "I solved it. Along with the line of thinking of this errant Examiner, for now."

Shaula: "That's Master for you! You're makin' me feel all tingly! Oh, how I yearned for this!"

With Meili on her back, Shaula gave him a thumbs-up and replied, then she shook her head vigorously. Looking at that from the corner of his eye, Julius looked over to the group of Monoliths, and said,

Julius: "I do not mean to doubt you right now. But please tell me how you managed to get the answer."

Subaru: "It's nothing spectacular. Y'all needn't feel bad for not solving this. Because in the first place, the people who have a chance at solving this are few."

This problem was the most contemptible in that sense.

The challengers had to overcome the obstacle that was Shaula, understand the details of the problem and yet, from the start, they had been narrowed down by the likelihood of knowing the answer to the problem.

Subaru: "The Hero destroyed by Shaula, their name is Orion."

Everyone: “Orion…?”

Everyone looked at Shaula in confusion after they heard the word that Subaru had spoken out. However, Shaula vigorously shook her head as everyone’s gazes converged on her and said, “I don’t know them!”.

Shaula: “Nopenopenope, I’ve got no idea who that is. And even if for a sec we assume I did kill them, what sort of person who can’t even make it all the way here gets called a Hero, it’s totally ridiculous. Soooo, I don’t think I’m the one to blame here. How you may ask, well by this argument from theory! I’m suuuuper~ smart!”

Subaru: “As you can see, this woman’s not smart at all. At first, I’d suspected that she may have actually forgotten, but that’s not the case. Reason being that the Shaula from this problem isn’t this woman in the first place.”

Shaula: “I’mmm~ the only Shaula! I got this name from Master!”

Subaru: “Even the name that your Master gave you came from someone else.”

He prodded out his finger to the tip of the protesting Shaula’s nose and pushed her away before she could get closer. Following that, Subaru walked over to the original Monolith and stood in front of it.

Emilia: “Maybe once again… only Subaru knows the origins of Shaula’s name?”

Subaru: “It isn’t just me who knows, though I suppose not everyone would know—— The name of a star in my hometown is called Shaula. The meaning of its name is «the stinger», but if I had to specify which kind of stinger, then it’d be the Scorpion’s stinger.”

Shaula had insisted on calling her hairstyle a scorpiontail, had that been a hint of some sorts, or was that some natural air-headedness of Shaula’s? Whichever one it was, there’d been a few things that had made him recall that “Shaula” was equal to “Scorpion” was equal to “Stinger”.

Subaru: “According to legend, the Hero Orion was stung by a scorpion which had been sent out to besiege him due to his boastfulness, and he ended up dying. After his death, he became a star. So, the scorpion that killed Orion also became a star due to its deed, and it’s said that even now in the sky Orion lives in fear of the scorpion …”

Beatrice: “Now that you’ve explained things, this legend has a pretty depressing vibe to it too, in fact.”

Subaru: “Anyways, think of it as having constellations where stars are illustrated by the figures of animals and people and such. You can even think of them as an asterism—— So, that’s how it looks when you look down on the Monoliths from above.”

Becoming practically weightless as a result of Beatrice’s magic, he jumped up and looked down at the group of Monoliths.

The scattered black Monoliths in this world of white—— Although the colors were inverted, a series of black stars floated about in this white world, forming a pattern which he was familiar with.

There were eight Monoliths in total which had the same size as the original one.

The number of major stars as well as how they were laid out both matched with how the constellation of Orion was shaped. And when he linked it to the last part, “Touch the brightest”——

Subaru: “The original Monolith is right in the middle. Well, I just gotta keep my eye on Alnilam and if I keep following the shape of the constellation… If I keep following Orion, then…”

Emilia: “Then?”

Subaru: “The phrasing «the brightest» is a bit of a roguish expression. In actual fact, stars shine in various different ways, sometimes they’re always bright, other times they shine brighter only every so often. Considering that, there are two stars that fit the bill for the brightest in Orion…”

When viewed from above, the two stars that fit the bill were the right shoulder of Orion located in the upper left part, Betelgeuse, and Orion’s left knee located in the lower right part, Rigel.

Rigel was always invariably bright, whereas Betelgeuse was a variable star that sometimes shone brighter than Rigel[80].

[80] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Have a helpful image if you need help visualizing this, though not all the stars are named here. Keep in mind that while Rigel is shown as the knee here, from Wikipedia, «In the constellation of Orion as the mythological Greek huntsman, Rigel represents his knee or (as its name suggests) foot; with the nearby star Beta Eridani marking Orion’s footstool». Tappei went with knee in the Japanese which is why you might find a discrepancy between this image and the translation”.

Solving the problem by picking both of them was not a pretty solution, but——

Subaru: “I guess I’ll go for Rigel.”

He had bad memories of a name similar to Betelgeuse[81].

Subaru: “————”

Setting his answer in stone, Subaru touched the Monolith on Orion’s left knee, Rigel.

This was not necessarily the only answer. But, most likely it should be the right one.

And at the same time he realized that, he readied himself for the precipitousness and difficulty of the obstacles that awaited them on the Second and First Floor, when considering the maliciousness of the person who had cooked up these Examinations.

Subaru: “————”

The white room was filled with a dazzling light.

Both sound and landscape were left behind, everything was blown away, before finally——

Subaru: “…Whoa.”

When the light died down, Subaru and the others were left standing in a room made out of stone—— in the middle of a room that was encompassed by countless bookshelves.

[81] Recall that the name of the Sin Archbishop of Sloth is not “ペテルギウス” (Betelgeuse), but “ペテルギウス” (Petelgeuse). This is a common misspelling of his name in Japanese, in fact. The difference might be significant.

Arc 6 Chapter 23 – The Third Floor Library, Taygeta Review

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 2 “A White Sky Asterism”, Parts 3-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo, DiscountAnon/Nanashi-tan) — Complete

The surrounding world of white evaporated, leaving behind a room carved of stone and uncountably infinite shelves.

Feeling the stone he had been touching disappear, Subaru took this to mean that his answer had been correct.

Then in that case——

Emilia: “Amazing! Subaru, good——”

Subaru: “The Examiner’s personality, is just too wicked!!”

Emilia: “Ehhhh!? That’s your first reaction!?”

Ready to celebrate that the Third Floor Taygeta had been solved, Emilia was stunned speechless. Echoing through the Tower was Subaru’s vitriolic cry.

Looking back to the surprised Emilia and everyone else watching him, Subaru gave a “My bad” as he continued to talk.

Subaru: “Although it’s as everyone suspected, and I’ve indeed solved the riddle… but that it was solved like this is a huge issue. Or rather, it’s unfair to all of you.”

Emilia: “Is that so? Subaru used esoteric knowledge to solve the riddle… is how it seems to me.”

Subaru: “Rather than saying I solved the riddle with my own knowledge, it’s more like only someone specifically like me can solve this, is the issue here.”

Tilting her head in confusion, Emilia faced Subaru as he scratched at his head.

To consider the best way to explain this in detail would turn out to be a bit of a problem.

The Exam of the Third Floor Taygeta, was just as Subaru had answered, derived from the myth of Orion. The notion he had set aside was “the person who riddled this might have been an astronomist or a romantic”, with the reason being that the myth of Orion did not exist in this world.

Whether Orion or the celestial name of Shaula, or any of the other constellations, all of those were astronomical knowledge from Subaru’s original world.

And this current world, perhaps was the far future, set after the civilization of Subaru’s original world had long been lost to the past. Subaru had long affirmed that this world’s night sky contained different stars than the ones he had known.

Subaru: “So, the passage of time completely changed the layout of the stars… in that case there’s no option but to just wave your hands in surrender, since Orion or whatever doesn’t exist anymore.”

After an extensive period of time, Orion had long since vanished from the night sky, and anything like his myths had disappeared too. If this were the case, one conjecture could be made.

The poser of the riddle, was someone who knew the same sky as Subaru.

Furthermore, all those aside from those who knew the stars of the previous world, were born naturally defeated by the Exam’s riddle.

And the one who had designed the riddle, according to Shaula’s report, was without a doubt Sage Flugel.

Subaru: “Your master, seems to have been a guy with a decidedly wicked personality.”

Shaula: “Nononono, why would you say that. It’s unlike Master to be self-deprecating! Although the wicked personality bit can’t be denied, it’s still reasonable for the riddle to be solved! If it were Reid it would indeed be unsolvable… something about revealing another self and being unable to pass without victory in battle?”

Subaru: “That’s horrifying, either way the tests would go nowhere…”

All in all, the heroes of the past who had subdued the Witch of Envy all seemed to have terrible personalities.

With this person, using knowledge from another world would probably work better.

Anastasia: “Alright, and now.”

As Subaru sighed over Shaula’s explanation that wasn’t an explanation, Anastasia interrupted the pair to glance around. Stroking her scarf, she examined the shelves crammed with books.

Anastasia: “Thanks to Natsuki-kun’s hard work, the Exam’s solved… That’s excellent, but what’s the point of the Library? What kinds of books does it have? I find this quite interestin’.”

Julius: “According to Miss Shaula, this place is a trove of knowledge without bound and without break—— is what she had said.”

Nodding in accord with Anastasia’s words, Julius glanced toward Shaula. Bearing an expression as if she had forgotten her own earlier words, Shaula had her skin pressed against Meili’s as she played with her.

The expectations had not been high to begin with, but it seemed that Shaula’s explanation of this Library of Taygeta was not forthcoming.

Beatrice: “From that reaction, it seems that this is the first time Taygeta has been opened, in fact. Let’s walk around and take a look, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Indeed. Hey you… could it be that you can’t hold back anymore?”

Beatrice: “That… might be the case, in fact.”

Clutching her dress from beside Subaru, Beatrice seemed to be speaking a tad faster than usual.

Eyes gleaming softly, gazing about the Library with fascination—— upon realizing the reason, Subaru forgot their circumstances and began laughing.

Subaru: “Seems like, the Forbidden Library wasn’t some unpleasant memory to you.”

Beatrice: “…It’s not a particularly pleasant memory, I suppose. However, in any case, it’s a place where Betty spent four-hundred years, in fact. In addition…”

Subaru: “In addition?”

Beatrice: “It’s where Subaru told Betty to «Choose me», I suppose. It’s not a place that can be so easily forgotten, in fact!”

Subaru: “————”

The unexpected words had Subaru’s eyes go round, and Beatrice turned her face away. But even from behind her reddened ears, a clear sign of embarrassment was plain to see.

Subaru: “Saying words that would embarrass you of your volition, just what are you trying to achieve?”

Beatrice: “Betty remembers everything about the Forbidden Library, that is proof of memories of Subaru… is all, in fact.”

Subaru: “You are… too cute!”

Beatrice: “Kyaaa~, I suppose!”

At the sudden declaration of affection, Subaru gently began stroking Beatrice’s head. Beatrice’s feline cry gradually softened, and Subaru saw an expression filled with satisfaction. The scene had Anastasia and the others glance at them with amazement.

Subaru: “Alright, enough of the idle chatter, let’s check out the Library now.”

Anastasia: “What a sight for sore eyes. It really seems like a gentle exchange between parent and child, doesn’t it…”

Subaru: “It’d at least be considered brother and sister, wouldn’t it?”

Sticking his tongue out at Anastasia’s opinion, Subaru straightened up and glanced about at his surroundings.

Where Subaru and the others were located, was the center of a stone carved circular room. The structure itself was an extension of the Tower, and the expansive design created a feeling of being left without boundaries.

Aside from the large spiral staircase, the Fifth and Sixth Floors had no particularly striking features to fill the vast empty spaces. And the Fourth Floor was in fact divided into several rooms, what Shaula had described as a versatile nest.

Yet the Third Floor filled the same empty space with rows upon rows of shelves, each tall shelf crammed with countless books. The circular room was designed to form small floors. Subaru's group was located on the lowest, surrounded by layers raising outward.

The books were so numerous as to be uncountable. Beatrice's Forbidden Library was also fairly crowded, but in terms of pure number of books, this place was by far victorious.

Subaru: "It'd be nice if you could search with a computer to find the book you want."

Beatrice: "Within the Forbidden Library, Betty knew exactly where every book was, in fact."

Subaru: "Amazing, you. A genius!"

After praising Beatrice's little show of smugness, Subaru approached the bookshelf beside him.

Looking over, Emilia and the others drew close as well, although it didn't seem as if anyone felt daring enough to pluck a book from the shelf.

Emilia: "Wasn't Subaru the one that solved the riddle? Maybe something would go awry if it's not Subaru that touches it."

Subaru: "Ah, indeed, anything could happen, but if the one who'd answered the riddle were the only person allowed to read anything, wouldn't it be weird that Emilia-tan and the rest were even allowed into the Library?"

Emilia: "Ah, right. Then it seems like entering this place is akin to permission."

Subaru: "Mm, that's what I think—— hey, Emilia-tan!?"

At Subaru's theory, Emilia who had kept her guard up nodded in understanding. Then, letting down her guard, she immediately pulled a book from the shelf.

Then she began flipping through the contents of the book, right before Subaru who had been struck speechless.

Emilia: "Hmm, it's just a normal book… Subaru, what is it?"

Subaru: "No, nothing, it's just that Emilia-tan's boldness was shocking but quickly became mesmerizing. I only said what I thought of it, is all."

Emilia's conscientious expression bore a confusion that left Subaru speechless. With complicated feelings, Subaru brought a hand up to cover his face with an "Uwaaah~".

Subaru: "It constantly feels like, that piercing gaze of trust is painful."

Julius: "You built it up bit-by-bit, is how it is. Furthermore, that you solved the riddle of Taygeta, which no one else could, is fact. Such an achievement is undeniable."

Subaru: "That was like a blind cat swatting a dead mouse. That I solved it was just coincidence."

At Subaru's bewilderment, Julius shrugged his shoulders, the Knight's words causing Subaru to avert his gaze.

Emilia's faith, Beatrice's closeness, Julius's sincerity—— each one of them, did not align to Subaru's expectations, and each of those words conveyed an inexplicable sense of wariness.

Subaru often doubted that kind of value being placed upon himself.

Anastasia: "Just as Emilia-san said, it's just an ordinary book. It's not some strange object that'd set your body on fire right after touchin' it."

Julius: "What the book is made of… is difficult to discern. As is its age. As for the content…?"

Inspired by Emilia's proactive attitude, one-by-one the others too begun picking up books. Even so, to skim the entirety this myriad of books, was hardly such an easy task.

Anastasia and Julius both examined the book's composition and binding and the like.

Subaru: "Beako, what do you think?"

Beatrice: "It seems that the composition of the books is identical, I suppose. Only the titles are completely different, in fact. This is «Noah Libertas». This is «Libre Fermi»… They don't seem to follow any particular pattern in their ordering either, I suppose."

Her librarian soul dripping blood, Beatrice expressed dissatisfaction with the one who had arranged the books so haphazardly. The absence of any memory of her sorting through the Forbidden Library, suggested that it had been organized long ago.

Putting aside Beatrice's indignation for now, Subaru sudden noticed something about the spines of the books.

Subaru: "The titles of these books… could it be, that they're all peoples' names?"

Emilia: "Mm… seems like it. This is «Palma Eule», and here's «Coyote»."

Julius: "All these names from the past are not familiar ones. Not that I hold any wealth of knowledge, but none of these names are ones I know. Of course, looking around more closely might yield some kind of discovery…"

Subaru: "If you don't recognize them, it's likely that no one here would."

Whether that was true or mere humbleness, of late Julius had been revealing more of the historical pedigree of his house. If these names were not in his knowledge, perhaps they were just randomly given ones.

Subaru also offhandedly grabbed a book to leaf through. The text written inside was composed of the common I-glyphs, Ro-glyphs, and Ha-glyphs, the unique language of this world.

Had it been a Gospel, no one aside from the owner should be capable of reading it, and only text composed of what seemed to be pictographs would have been visible, but this book did not seem to use such petty tricks.

Since the text was miniscule, and the content itself was too boring, it would not register in the brain even if read properly, a common issue with uninteresting books.

Subaru: “Once again, to check with Anastasia-san… are there any names you recognize?”

Anastasia: “——Mm~, nope?”

Subaru sought confirmation from Anastasia. Or course, rather than from Anastasia herself, it would be better to say he sought confirmation from Echidna who held control over her flesh.

Echidna should be in possession of more knowledge than Julius was. And though it was possible she was concealing the truth, from the very beginning the Spirit had not shown any hints of hostility.

Believing her answer for now, Subaru began to feel rather impotent.

Subaru: “Out of tricks already, huh. A tree hidden in a forest… it could be that a vitally important book is hidden somewhere in these shelves, this really is troublesome.”

Emilia: “Giving up halfway through won’t do. Facing an unsolvable problem means that you have to try even harder. Work hard!”

Faced with a vast number of books, Subaru who had already felt uneasy had his soul assaulted by exhaustion. Emilia raised a tiny fist for Subaru to cheer him on.

Striking a pose increasingly more accurate to the encouraging one Emilia had, Subaru turned to face the shelf. The titles of these books all contained unfamiliar names. At the very least, should he come across a name he recognized, he would look into it with care—— Thinking so, Subaru brushed his fingers along a row, book-by-book.

Subaru: “…?”

Suddenly, Subaru’s fingers came to rest on one spine.

Grabbing the spine of the book, then easing it out from the stuffed bookshelf. The book’s title was a name that Subaru was cognizant of.

Subaru, having reflexively grabbed the book, flipped it open. Then, the familiar name of the book met his eyes—— and afterward, it came.

——A dimming of the consciousness.

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——A woman, a sole woman existed.

A woman so young, one would hesitate to call her a woman.

Humble clothes upon a skinny figure, green hair along with a skin tanned in the shine of days.

The woman seemed to be at an age to be a called a little girl, however, her heart was commanded by unending distress.

Unable to find the answer for it by any means, for the woman, it was an inborn argument.

Woman: "————"

Evermore troubling her mind with it, was the unending supreme argument.

It was the logic omnipresent in the world, that contrast of white and black—— namely, of good and evil.

Righteousness, deeds of err. Though there were innumerable choices in the world, all deeds would eventually be decided to tilt towards either of those positive and negative poles.

For the yet youthful woman, there was a reason to continue to anguish over that logic. It was inevitable for her.

The one who had divided the woman's world into white and black, good and evil, the righteous and the sinners, was the woman's father.

Woman: "————"

The woman's father decapitated the necks of sinners, and made a living by delivering punishment appropriate for the errs.

Delivering the end of their life, the punishment suitable for their err, upon the sinners who had sinned, meant livelihood to her father.

???: "——Executioner."

The woman had seen the actions of her father, who was named that, and the state of affairs of the execution site, before even the days of youth.

The repulsive and cruel deeds, the death wails of the sinners granted quietus, the execution site ruled by blood and death.

——What made the woman witness Death there, was none other than her father's own will.

Punishment cast upon the committed sins, evil deeds met their result through the means of evil deeds.

The father attempted to convey the rightful state of affairs he believed in, of the world's good and evil, as an executioner, to the woman.

Noble was her father's will, a pure ideology without question.

However, keeping the mind the woman's youthfulness, it seemed to be conceited, it was yet too early to seek ideals.

The woman witnessed the deaths of many with her own eyes, scented the odor of blood, and seared the punishment cast upon sinners into her memory.

The result, the woman, before she could study the value of life in-depth, and the principle of life and death, learnt punishments befitting the sins.

Benevolence gave birth to good cause, wrongdoings called upon roots of evil, the souls of sinners were corrupted, worthy of punishment.

Comprehending the teachings of her father through that interpretation, the woman desired the rightful state of affairs for “Punishments Befitting the Sins”. For that she sought something which would become her guiding principle, the balance of virtue which would establish evil deeds as evil.

Woman: “————”

However, the balance which the woman pursued, existed nowhere within her sphere of search.

The good and evil of affairs had no simple answer, but the correction, sin and punishment possessed many factors determining them.

Woman: “————”

However, the woman, yet youthful and unknowing of compromise or resignation, did not to come to a halt.

She must obtain the answer. She must conceive the balance befitting good and evil in her heart.

She must present the answer to the undissolving doubt present within the interior of her chest.

Woman: “————”

Days of agony continued, however, she gained the answer suddenly, as if a blessing had been granted to her from the heavens above.

Shattering her father’s vine cup, the woman was greatly frightened by the sin she had committed herself. Preparing herself to face beheading, the woman confessed her own sin to her father.

Father: “——Speaking up your own sins, and apologizing for them, is correct.”

Said the woman’s father while expressing a smile, forgiving the woman’s err.

At the smile of her father and the sensation of his palm patting her head, the youthful woman came to understand.

——The balance for measuring the weight of the committed sin was nothing else, but present within the heart of the sinner himself.

Even if nobody bore witness to it, the heart of the sinner himself was cognizant of their sin.

Good and evil, she did not understand. They were complicated. Corrections had no certain guidelines. They could not be found.

However, the consciousness of the sin was within one's self.

There were no standards for punishments befitting the sins. However, the consciousness of sins deserving of punishments was within one's self.

The woman understood, she was satiated, and finally obtained the balance.

Remaining ignorant of the value of life, and the principle of the life and death of people, the youthful woman disclosed punishments befitting the sins.

Woman: "————"

Under the light of days the woman walked, learning through observation from her executioner father, for delivering punishments befitting the sins.

For disclosing the hearts of those sinners, who had been judged worthy of punishment.

Woman: "————"

For the woman, the division of good and evil, corrections, sincerity and falsehood into two halves, was the natural order of things.

At the question the youthful woman would pose some smiled, some were troubled, some were bewildered.

However, the result of the answer to the woman's question, was the same for all.

——The sins worthy of punishment, lied within their selves.

She looked around. Nobody was there. There no longer was anyone present here, aside from the sinners who had received punishment.

Trampling over the people who had been torn into tiny fragments, and finally over the fragments of her own father, for the sake of fulfilling the longstanding desire bestowed upon her, the woman continued walking further, seeking sins worthy of punishment.

——The Witch of Pride questioned sins, delivered punishment, and cast judgement upon sinners.

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Upon seeing the beginnings of the Witch he recognized, Subaru's consciousness returned alongside pain.

Subaru: "Ahhh——!!"

Subaru's consciousness was ejected from the book with a snapping sound. Accompanied by a feeling of having blood drained dry on one hand, and a feeling of being externally torn into bits on the other.

Pain resonating not from the head or body, but the soul. The soul entering the book, then being painfully torn away from it.

???: "Subaru!"

Subaru: "——Ahhh!"

At the same instant that a cry came from beside him, his wrist took a fierce strike. That was Emilia knocking his wrist with a karate chop.

Subaru's hand shook under the impact, and the book he held fell to the ground. It landed spread face down on the ground, and Subaru stumbled into a bookshelf.

Subaru: "Oh, ah?"

Emilia: "Ha, are you okay? Just now, you looked reaaally uncomfortable…"

Subaru: "Somehow, it's over… right? I don't get it either."

Nodding at Emilia who supported him with unease in her eyes, Subaru caught his breath. Although he had not done any sprinting, his heartbeat was in a frenzy.

周囲の白い空間が消え去り、代わりに現れたのは天井まで埋め尽くす無数の書架。
なんとなしに手に取って、スバルは本を開く。
そして、知人の名前が入った本の中身に目を通し――直後、それがきた。
――意識が、暗転する。

Pressing a hand against his chest to feel the jumping of his heartbeat, Subaru breathed deep. His gaze swiveled around, finally landing on Emilia.

Emilia: “Is everything fine?”

Subaru: “Gazing upon Emilia-tan’s face puts me at ease. Could you give me a hand?”

Emilia: “Alright. What happened?”

Accepting Subaru’s flattering words, Emilia supported his shoulder and asked. As she queried on, Beatrice reached a hand toward the book on the ground.”

Beatrice: “Just now, your expression grew odd after touching this book, I supp…”

Subaru: “Wait, Beatrice! Don’t touch it!”

Beatrice: “——?”

Wanting to call Beatrice to a halt as she reached for the book, she had taken it into her lap before he could. Casting her gaze downward, Beatrice read the book’s title aloud under Subaru’s furious gaze.

Beatrice: “——«Typhon». Is this the name of someone Subaru knows, I suppose?”

Subaru: “It is, could it be that you…”

At Beatrice’s question, Subaru wanted to ask, “Could it be that you don’t know”. However, whether her answer would be in the affirmative or negative was already obvious, and Subaru frowned as he considered what should be said next.

In that period, Beatrice had already opened the book to check its contents.

Subaru: “Idiot——!”

Beatrice: “Idiot is a rather rude thing to say, in fact. There’s nothing special about this book, it’s just the same as the others, I suppose.”

Beatrice would have the same shocking experience that Subaru had—— although that was what had been expected, the girl had no reaction whatsoever to the book's contents. She disappointedly shoved the book back at Subaru.

Beatrice: "However, Subaru hasn't read any of the other books… is how it seems, in fact."

Subaru: "…Right. But why is it just me?"

Emilia: "Could it be, that just like the riddle of the room, only Subaru can understand it? Or, that it only works for Subaru, who solved the riddle…"

Subaru: "If that's so, that personality just seems more and more wicked, huh…"

Considering Emilia's words, Subaru shook his head as an unpleasant hunch came over him. In any case, he had no courage to peruse the book that had been shoved at him once more.

——Swimming through his mind, all too vividly, was a firsthand experience of the woman's memories.

The scents, taste of the air, tread on solid ground, as well as the weight of shattering a life.

To awaken after such immersion in the memory of a person, was truly a miracle.

It felt as if drinking down another person's life. That terror and disgust beyond imagining, had come into existence through experience.

Emilia: "Subaru, where is this Typhon?"

Subaru: "It'd be hard to explain properly… or rather, it may not be so hard if it's Emilia-tan? Maybe you saw her in the Tomb?"

Emilia: "Tomb——"

Upon hearing that word, Emilia and Beatrice froze simultaneously.

The Tomb was, to Subaru, in addition to Emilia and Beatrice, a place laden with significance. Thus, considering the Witches' Tea Party that held in that ancient Tomb, the other two knowing of Typhon would not be so odd.

That said, perhaps Echidna would not have been so candid with Emilia, and as for Beatrice, she had probably known a different Echidna than Subaru had.

Subaru: “Typhon was one of the historical Witches. The Witch of Pride, who looked like Beako, a loli with dark skin. However, she was a child who could reify innocently cruel words.”

Hearing Subaru’s explanation, Emilia and Beatrice both shook their heads after considering.

It seemed Echidna’s display of Witches had been reserved especially for Subaru. Although it had just been to make use of Subaru, there had indeed been much preparation but into it.

Subaru: “Innocently cruel, huh…?”

As he spoke, Subaru recalled that he had only had a brief period of contact with Typhon himself.

Although it had not occurred in the physical world, the sensation of his arms and legs being shattered by her was unforgettable. Although it had been subsequently fixed, the impact of his limbs being taken had still hit at full force.

However, after catching a glimpse of her abnormal origin through reading, the reason for such behaviors could be explained. Of course, to instantly understand the complex and nuanced reasoning, was no easy feat.

Subaru: “In any case, that book I read just now, were that child named Typhon’s… memories? Life? Origin? In summary it was the experience of her entire life. Hardly something easy to come to terms with.”

Emilia: “It’s clear from seeing Subaru’s reaction… experiencing the memory of another. This is feeling more and more like the Tomb’s Trials.”

Subaru: “In that case, it was just a struggle with your own memories. Weeell~, hardly anything so difficult.”

Emilia: “R-right. An easy victory.”

Denying any sobbing cries, countless failures one upon another, body and mind collapsing under pressure, Subaru and Emilia both nodded and chose not to mention them.

As she rolled her eyes at the pair's attitude, Beatrice wiped at the book's stains.

Beatrice: "A book showing experiences of another's memories… in other words, it's a way of accessing the past, I suppose. In that case, what we need to know is likely contained in the Library…"

Subaru: "Beako, have you thought of something——"

Hearing Beatrice's murmurs, Subaru rose and prepared to ask her for her thoughts. However, before Subaru had a chance to speak, someone else's voice rang out.

Julius: "——Hk."

The sound had come from the direction of Julius's group, who had been examining the other bookshelves. Following the direction of the cry, was the sight of Julius kneeling on the ground, with a book in hand.

From beside him an alarmed Anastasia shook the Knight's shoulder, snatching the book away.

Anastasia: "Julius? Julius, pull yourself together! Can ya hear my voice?"

Julius: "…Anastasia, -sama."

Anastasia: "It's me, good. Slowly, deep breaths… Are ya fine?"

In precisely the same way Subaru had just been, Julius's awareness returned to the present. Gazing at Julius's form that was elegant even in weariness, relief was shown on Anastasia's expression.

Calling out "Is everything okay?", Subaru dashed toward the pair.

Subaru: "Is your head spinning after reading a difficult book? I get it, I get it."

Julius: "Certainly, of late I have not read anything. A deplorable state for a Knight who must be versed in civil affairs and warfare[82]. I ought to learn from you who managed to solve the riddles with such ease."

Subaru: "Such words, delivered with such smoothness…"

[82] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "A reference to a concept in Chinese philosophy and political culture. For more information, see here."

If he had felt what Subaru had, his spirit would have borne quite the burden. As such, that he could maintain such elegance afterwards was just uncool.

At the extraneous thoughts contained in Subaru's heart, Emilia knocked at the back of his head with a karate chop.

Subaru: "Gah!"

Emilia: "It won't do to say naughty things on reflex. Julius, is everything really fine?"

Julius: "My sincerest apologies for having worried you. Such an exaggerated reaction truly cannot be excused… Even so, this is truly an unpleasant experience for the heart."

Hiding his internal weariness, Julius's response to Emilia was elegant. However, a thin film of sweat coating his forehead was evidence of a shock that could not be concealed. Anastasia stood on her tiptoes, pressing a handkerchief to Julius's forehead, while Julius hurriedly lowered his head with an air of consternation.

Anastasia: "Altho' stubbornness is a boy's nature, speak up when you're feelin' poorly, won''cha? If ya insist on doin' somethin' beyond you, ya'll cause trouble for everyone else too."

Julius: "Right. My gratitude for your attentions."

Emilia: "Mhm, it's just as Anastasia-san says. Right, Subaru?"

Subaru: "Though I don't know why you need me to agree, that's how it is!"

The exchange between master and vassal of two factions coming to a close, everyone's attention turned to the book in Anastasia's hands.

Julius had looked over the contents of the book, and perhaps had had the same experience as Subaru. Looking at the spine, the title inscribed upon it was——

Emilia: "——Balleroy Temeglyph. Someone you know?"

Subaru: "It's not a name I've heard. For certain."

Subaru glanced at Emilia who read the title aloud from beside him, then responded confidently.

Indeed, Subaru was confident in his excellent memory. When it came to remembering relationships in this world, from Arlam Village to the uncle who owned a fruit stall in the Royal Capital, not a single one was missing.

Contained within the list of memories, was no such name as Balleroy. However, Anastasia swiveled her head after hearing the name, wearing a thoughtful expression.

Anastasia: “That name’s one I’ve heard. Perhaps… hmm, that’s right. Maybe… Um, right. Isn’t that the name of a General of the Vollachian Empire?”

Julius: “——More precisely, he is a former General.”

At Anastasia’s answer borne from vague recollections, Julius added a supplement. Hearing such words, everyone would guess that was someone who Julius had a relationship with.

Only, the distance of that relationship had Subaru frowning.

Subaru: “Vollachia, is that the country to the south? You even know a General from there?”

Julius: “Once more, he is a former General. Is that so odd? I am after all one of the Royal Guards. Since Lugunica and the Vollachian Empire neighbor each other, it should not be unexpected that I one-sidedly know the name.”

Subaru: “So that’s the case, someone known one-sidedly… Huh.”

Accepting Julius’s explanation, Subaru nodded. Then he exhaled lightly and suddenly reached a hand out to snatch Balleroy’s book from Anastasia.

Anastasia: “Natsuki-kun?”

Subaru: “Sorry to startle you. But there’s something that ought to be checked.”

Having had the book snatched from her, Anastasia widened her eyes. Subaru checked the cover of the book, then flipped the book open with a snap to read its contents.

In that moment, Subaru had prepared for the realizing of “living vicariously” that may have followed. However, he also considered the idea that perhaps it would not happen. The correct answer proved to be the latter.

Subaru: “I also tried to read the book after one-sidedly hearing the name, but nothing happened.”

Julius: “…Subaru.”

Subaru: “Right now, what matters most between us is trust, no? The trust you and I share… wouldn’t be nonexistent, and only I had thought it was there?”

Julius: “——What a horrid way of putting it.”

Toward Subaru who glared fiercely at him, Julius closed his eyes and answered thus. He stroked his bangs as he spoke,

Julius: “Compared with the people here, I currently have no one else I can trust more. The support of Anastasia-sama and yourself who provides what even Reinhard cannot, I would of course accept.”

Subaru: “…To be spoken of like that, can’t help but feel disgusting somehow.”

Julius: “Saying so makes my tongue itch as well.”

Subaru scratched at his nose, and Julius continued to finger at his bangs with eyes closed. Then he loosened a high, and proceeded to formally bow to Anastasia and Emilia.

Julius: “I apologize for my thoughtlessly offensive behavior, Anastasia-sama, Emilia-sama. Just now, I allowed my own feelings to cloud my answer. In these circumstances, the contents of the book ought to be shared by us all, and so my behavior is unforgivable.”

Anastasia: “Whether or not ya’ll be forgiven depends on mine and Emilia-san’s tempers. What do ya think?”

Emilia: “What I want to say, has already been said by Subaru and Anastasia-san. So, think about what you should do now. That’s all.”

After Emilia and Anastasia readily accepted his apology, Julius once again bowed low. Subaru knew exactly what lay within his heart.

After making a mistake, taking mitigation from those who accepted an apology, was a weakness that could be forgiven. Subaru well understood this feeling, which he had experienced before himself.

Julius: “Balleroy Temeglyph. A General of the Vollachian Empire… is a deceased man. And, the one who took his life, is none other than myself.”

Anastasia: “To have killed another country’s General. ‘Tis quite a shock to take in.”

Julius: “Anastasia-sama is… No, please forget what you just heard.”

Anastasia: “————”

At Julius’s frankly described recollections, Anastasia narrowed her eyes.

Based on Julius’s reaction just now, it seemed that this had been something he had already shared with Anastasia, before he had disappeared from memory, and before Echidna had assumed control of her body.

Naturally, that Anastasia was the first to know was unsurprising, and instead Subaru and Emilia were quite shocked.

Emilia: “That’s, if what I recall from my studies is correct, I know that the relationship between Lugunica and Vollachia is reaaally poor, but…”

Subaru: “Shouldn’t killing a General of the Empire have started a war or something?”

At the pair’s candid and simple questions, Julius’s expression became more assured as he nodded lightly.

Julius: “This was the result of a very delicate situation. Reinhard and Ferris were also dragged into it, to put it in short, the General had prepared to launch a revolt in the Empire. And I had met him face-to-face, and stayed in the Empire for a brief period.”

Subaru: “So those two were there too. Isn’t Reinhard banned from being exported?”

Julius: “Since the Emperor of the Empire wished to meet him, he was granted permission… moreover, do you not think those words, «exporting Reinhard», are off?”

Subaru: “Just a slip of the tongue. What else should I call it. Smuggling?”

Something that could not be exported, such phrasing was not wrong in usage. In truth, after having felt Reinhard’s logic-defying combat ability in Pristella, it was not difficult to imagine that Reinhard would be a nightmare for the forces of other countries to contend with.

Not allowed to approach the border, was a perfectly understandable stipulation in international treaties.

Julius: “In short, that general’s name was Balleroy Temeglyph. My apologies. Due to the sensitive nature of the issue, details of the incident cannot be shared, and in addition the memory is painful to myself as well.”

Subaru: “So it’s something that can’t be discussed openly, huh. Got it. I’ll keep my mouth shut.”

Emilia: “Mhm, understood. I’ll also keep it a secret.”

With Julius’s circumstances clarified, Subaru and Emilia swore themselves to secrecy on this shared confidence.

And, what allowed Julius to “live vicariously” was also clear——

Beatrice: “It makes sense now, in fact. The books here, are books that allow a reader to experience the life of someone familiar, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I had the Witch, and Julius had the General. Sounds about right.”

Anastasia: “It feels as if I’ve heard words I can’t quite let go. Natsuki-kun, are ya acquainted with a Witch? They’re no good, such relationships. They’re all related to the Witch Cult.”

Subaru: “I’m beyond scared myself, but the relationship with that one is shallow, so please rest assured. Recently there hasn’t been much contact to be a bother.”

Subaru shrugged at Anastasia’s words. However, the expressions of Emilia and Beatrice, and finally even Julius, looked as if they had just eaten something sour.

The unexpected reaction left Subaru frowning, as Anastasia deeply sighed and continued,

Anastasia: “The meaning of the books and this Library seem clear now. To share it I’ve gotta say something scary, is that okay?”

Subaru: “Hearing that is really off-putting, but what do you want to say?”

Anastasia: “Every book in this Library, is inscribed with a name, yes?”

Saying this fact that everyone knew, Anastasia looked to Subaru for permission to continue. As Subaru nodded in assent, he thought that what would be coming next were those scary words.

Then, Anastasia leveled a finger at Balleroy’s book and Typhon’s book, currently held by Beatrice.

Anastasia: “The Empire’s General, and Natsuki-kun’s Witch friend.”

Subaru: “Hey, not a friend here!”

Anastasia: “The common point with that Witch friend’s book, is that it’s the book of someone deceased.”

Subaru: “————”

Having Typhon be referred to as deceased was actually a little off-putting, but the place where the Witches’ Tea Party of the Tomb had been held was no more, so she could be thought of as completely gone.

As for Echidna, since many doubts yet rested on Eridna, Subaru could not feel at ease about her.

Setting aside Subaru’s internal thoughts for now, Anastasia spread her hands to gesture at the entirety of the library as she continued.

Anastasia: “The books here, include the names of every single person from past to present in this world, aight? If so… to find one specific book, how long’d it take?”

——Correction. The one who had made this library, did not have a poor personality.

——Rather, they had the worst[83].

[83] Rough translation of a note from Tappei at the end of the Chapter: "During this story, Julius mentioned «The Empire's Diplomacy is Seriously Terrible», which is something depicted in a series of short stories that are being serialized in Gekkan Comic Alive. It doesn't matter if you don't know anything about it, but since the author writes about twenty-thousand characters every month while almost dying, it would be interesting and nice if you found and read it. Hear ye, hear ye". I'll also add that the story this is referring to is listed here and here as "Royal Election Prequel: Imperial Diplomacy of Bloodshed", and was adapted in EX Volume 4, which has been translated into English by YenPress; I would personally recommend you buy and read that version.

Arc 6 Chapter 24 - Wicked Examiner

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 3 “The Taygeta Archive”, Parts 2-3, and Volume 22, Intermission “——Memories of Yore”

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Hedge) — Complete

——A woman, a sole woman existed.

The woman was always emotional. The woman was always crying. Sensitive to pain, she was constantly weeping.

The sole reason for her grief, was that she could not forgive her own lack of strength.

All around her, was always a world full of strife, of violence, of war.

No matter how much she pleaded, no matter how much she cried out, no matter how much she tried, no matter how much she wept and sobbed, the sorrow never ended. Thus, she began to curse fate.

While cursing it over and over and over, she noticed this fate; It was pointless, no matter how many tears she shed.

And when she realized, she began wishing for something else. Raw power.

To obtain power that would let her throw all away, that would let her overwhelm all others, she struggled to her limits and ran, heading towards the power she so desired.

She was not chasing after the power to harm, nor the power to take. She had no use for that.

She chased power no one could catch up to, which she believed she could use to put an end to violence.

The woman who cried so much, wanted the power to cease crying.

She knew she that if she remained powerless, she could never stop a fight where power was pitted against power.

Her voice remained silent. Her wishes went unfulfilled. Even if her own sorrows were kept distant, sadness still clouded the sky.

How could they be okay? How could they hurt one another? How could they think to live with those scars? How, how, how? Why could they not realize they had other ways to live?

Woman: “Children are crying. The elderly are crying. Men are crying. Women are crying. Everyone is crying. Then, why——!!”

To stop exactly that, she solely desired for power. Training herself, she endured all pains to finally obtain an iron-clad will.

Eventually, she found the end of her path. The pinnacle of strength where none else could reach.

Standing on the battlefield, she shouted to stop the fight.

To overwhelm all other powers with her own, to crush all grief, shatter all malice and to stop the endless stream of tears before her, she struggled to her utmost.

Punching those who brandished their swords, kicking those who flung magic, breaking those who bared their fangs, she pulverized all and any who came to seek battle.

But, the more the woman fought, the stronger became the swordsmen, the mages and the bearer of fangs, ever increasing their numbers.

As if she had entered a never-ending spiral of violence.

No one knew how to save themselves other than to answer violence with violence. That was why, no one knew of a way to save themselves aside from victory in battle.

Woman: “Why——!!”

In the end, the woman herself, despite knowing this, also answered with violence. Lowering her fist that dripped crimson, she turned her blood-smeared face to the sky, and wailed.

The fighting would not stop. Her efforts, her hard work, all had been in vain; neither others nor her own tears would stop flowing.

Finally, in the chest of the woman who had been ceaselessly running, despair crept in.

Dripping down her cheeks, tears overflowed. The tears that continuously streamed were not warm, but rather cold, the tears of someone powerless, drowning in despair.

However, alongside them flowed out a different, deep emotion.

Dyeing her heart pitch-black, her vision red and her mind white, a tempest awakened within.

Face still wet with tears, the woman came to know of that emotion. As she came to know its name, its origins, she came to understand it.

She had not been shedding tears of sadness.

She had merely been drowning in the madness of rage.

People called that emotion Fury—— no, they called it Wrath.

Towards this world that forced others to tears, towards those who refused to stop fighting, towards the absurd unfairness that was the end of life.

——Let them, have a taste of my iron fists.

At some point, she stood up, wiped the dirt off her knees, and took off running.

Diving into the fray of the still-ongoing battle, she punched everyone’s faces whilst shouting.

Stop fighting. Look at the sky. Feel the breeze. Smell the flowers. Live, with your families and loved ones.

For the first time, the woman’s voice swept unrest throughout the battlefield.

Fists that could break apart the very earth, kicks that could cause the heavens to roar, all only to let others live.

Wounds closed, screams silenced and knees bent in the face of the spreading warmth, as battle lost its meaning.

Soon the voices that wept disappeared from the battlefield, life returned to the mundane.

Once the people's tears stopped, they felt gratitude towards her. They raised their voices, waved their hands and smiled.

However, the woman was suddenly no longer there.

That was only natural.

The woman still had things to do. She had no reason to turn back, no reason to stop walking.

To fulfill her desire to create a world where no one would cry, where there would be no conflict, where no one would have to take from one another.

She ran, and ran, and kept running, as she threw around her fists.

Till the day everyone's tears ceased. Till the day the warm droplets rolling down her cheeks stopped.

——The Witch of Wrath, who had declared war on sadness itself, continued to run, evermore.

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Subaru: "————"

Yet again, after finding a Book of the Dead and gaining the knowledge it held, Subaru returned to reality.

From within the confines of its bindings had poured out the life of the name it recorded, the many battlefields she had crossed through, and the conviction she once held when she had been alive, albeit, all of it being only a drop in the ocean of her entire life.

Even though he understood that——

Subaru: "…That was heavy."

He felt as if a lump of dense, heavy lead was clogging up his chest.

For humans, no matter who, a second was a second, a minute was a minute, a year was a year. There was no scale that could measure the weight of a life differently, and thus time flowed equally for all.

Such a scale of time, could not simply be contained within such flimsy paper, nor could it be transcribed from such a thing into the mind, no matter how special the technology.

Still, even though he had simply touched it, Subaru had to clench his teeth to keep his mind, so as to not be swept away by the rush of memories that flowed in.

The footprints of their lives that one left behind, were indeed great and heavy.

???: “Subaru, are you okay?”

Subaru: “…Ah, yeah, I’m fine. Feeling okay. My head just took a spin, that’s all.”

Emilia: “That’s not what feeling okay means…”

Closing the Book in hand, he returned it to the shelf as Emilia watched. Meeting her gaze with one eye closed, Subaru pointed to the Book he just put back,

Subaru: “I found another volume of the Witches’ Books. This time, well, it was one of the better Witches, if that’s possible. She was still a little weird, though.”

Emilia: “The weird one… Sekhmet?”

Subaru: “Hey, that’s one of the weirdest of the bunch. Wait, you know Sekhmet?”

Back at the Tomb of the Sanctuary, Emilia was supposed to have met Echidna in the Witch’s Tea Party, but Subaru had never asked if she had met the others. He had assumed Echidna made an exception for him, and so, had not allowed Emilia to meet the other five Witches. So it startled Subaru when Sekhmet’s name slipped from her mouth.

The Witch of Sloth, Sekhmet, was a woman with long, flowing magenta hair, owner of a deeply self-indulgent personality. Putting that and her demeanor aside, she was the most reasonable person among the Witches.

Subaru: “If you know Sekhmet, what about the other Witches? Like, the one from this Book, Minerva, or something.”

Emilia: “Errr, no, sorry. I didn’t meet anyone else but Echidna and Sekhmet at the Tomb. I didn’t talk to Sekhmet all that much either.”

Subaru: “That so. No, it’s fine either way. Even if you did know her, this wasn’t something you’d enjoy seeing anyway.”

Flashing a dry smile at Emilia who hung her head, Subaru tapped the side of the bookshelf lightly.

The shelves that stored the memories of the dead were made of a strange material. Under his palm was not the sensation of wood, nor of iron, and the bookcase itself refused to budge when pressed.

Currently, while going through the Library on the Third Floor Taygeta, Subaru and co. came to understand that the numerous books that were stuffed into the bookshelves both recorded and invoked the memories of the dead.

Despite that, they steadily continued their search for something very simple.

Emilia: “That aside, I wonder where the stairs to get to the upper floor are?”

Subaru: “Right now, I have zero leads on that…”

Emilia tilted her head, deep in thought, while Subaru stood opposite, gazing downward as he sighed.

At present, everyone was worrying their heads over, not on the question of the Examination that laid beyond the Third Floor Taygeta, but on the location of the stairway that led to the Second Floor.

The white area where the Monolith had been had faded, leaving open Taygeta’s Great Library.

Thanks to that, they now had access to the memories of the dead, a concept that was surely very desirable, which was good and all but,

Subaru: “Well, for now, we don’t really have a use for this place.”

To search for the information everyone wanted by digging through the memories of the dead would be a herculean task, given its nature, as one could not even choose the memories they wanted to see, due to the absurd amount of time, and even luck, it would take.

Neither of those could be spared at the moment. Time was obviously short, but Subaru did not have enough faith in his own luck as well, no matter how much he was blessed with it.

Subaru: “So maybe the info we want is on the upper floors. It’s supposed to be.”

Emilia: “But, there’s no way to get upstairs. I tried to get on top of the bookcases, but it didn’t work out.”

Subaru: “You’re pretty bold, aren’t you, Emilia-tan…”

Emilia pointed to the ceiling while recalling what she had tried to do.

In the midst of their brain-wracking search for the staircase that led to the upper floor, she had climbed up on top of the tallest bookcase there was in the Library—— the cases were arranged in a circular fashion, with small steps elevated to lead inward, placing the tallest bookcase at the center. However, even that had not reached the ceiling of the room.

It should be noted that, despite how Emilia had climbed the bookcase, and despite how her short skirt was waving about boldly during the action itself, her movements were such that nothing was visible underneath, strangely enough.

When Subaru poked at it in a roundabout manner, Emilia simply touched the hem of her skirt and,

Emilia: “Puck taught me. Hm, what was it again? A lady must always act with beauty and grace… was it? I’m always careful about it, don’t worry.”

Subaru: “I feel kinda conflicted about this. I want to praise him, but I want to blame him too… Anyway.”

Emilia had already failed in her attempt to physically force a way to the next floor.

In other words, there was a hidden gimmick to the appearance of the staircase—— this was not only limited to the appearance of the Library, but extended to the process of going up further.

If it were too hard, the challenger's motivation would likely fall, but the creator of the Watchtower, Flugel, must have taken that into account as well. The nerve.

Subaru: "Man, I really wanna see this guy's face… But how he looks is a mystery too, damnit."

???: "——Subaru, can you come here a bit?"

While he grumbled, a voice called from behind him. On the opposite side of Subaru and co., rummaging through a separate bookcase, was Julius. Seeing him approach with Anastasia in tow, Subaru raised his hand.

Subaru: "Sure, what's up. You found something?"

Julius: "Unfortunately, nothing worth mentioning. I have not been able to find a single volume with a name I know, since that first one. Your side appears to be in a similar situation as well."

Emilia: "That's not really accurate. Subaru did a good job, he really did find another volume, then looked through it and started looking kinda wobbly. Right, Subaru?"

Subaru: "I'll take Emilia-tan's praise to heart, but that's how it is."

Julius: "I see. Please take care of yourself."

Subaru knotted his brows as Julius turned away from him, disinterested. While watching the two from aside, Emilia spoke,

Emilia: "But, Julius and the others haven't found the stairs too, huh. We're really in trouble."

Julius: "I understand where Emilia-sama is coming from… However, if we are to believe that this Library does indeed record the names of all the dead, from the past to the present, although it is quite hard to digest, I am afraid we alone cannot make much progress. We need many more people, like the entire population of a country, or so."

Julius proposed with a serious face. Subaru had no objections with the proposal's idea, feeling that such a number was more or less necessary. The Augria Sand Dunes had already been conquered, and if one needed to only reach the Watchtower, one only had to avoid the Witchbeast Den. That alone could be a great adventure by itself but——

Julius: “Unlike before, the way to the Tower is as good as open. I believe that it is worthwhile to report the existence of this mysterious Library to the Royal Capital. We could make a much more effective use of it in such a manner.”

Subaru: “The value of this information is definitely nothing to joke about… But I’m also pretty sure a lot of history buffs just like you will be born from this, eh.”

Julius: “That is a mere side-effect.”

Faced with Subaru’s teasing, Julius quickly replied, sinking into silence right after. After nary a moment, he sighed, punctuating with a “No”, and sighed,

Julius: “…To say I am not expecting that, would be a lie. Apologies. I had a selfish motive for that proposal.”

Subaru: “Come on, don’t get down like that. What’s wrong with being self-centered? If you’re feeling so sorry for that, what are you gonna make of me? I’m working just for my own sake, one-hundred-percent of the time.”

Never truly acting out of duty, always expecting some kind of reward, that was how Subaru behaved in basic terms. It was always about him, that was his way of life, his philosophy.

That was why he could not compare to Knights like Julius or Reinhard.

Subaru: “Anyway, there’s no point in keeping yourself from it. I mean, the reason Anastasia-san herself wants to become the Monarch is pretty self-centered, right?”

Anastasia: “Yup, that’s right. I wanna become the Monarch because I wanna satisfy my greed. If I do, I can profit a lot more. That’s all there is to it.”

Anastasia laughed at Subaru’s crass remark without any traces of being offended, then softly patted the white fur of her scarf.

Anastasia: “That’s why I think it’s so amusin’ that Julius became my Knight. At least, I think that way. Does Emilia-san and y’all think the same?”

Subaru: “Personally, it’s better for us if you guys’ paces don’t match, so just go along that and fall apart… Ouch! Emilia-tan, it hurts!”

Emilia: “Don’t say mean things—— I’m personally not acquainted with Anastasia-san and her Camp from before, so I can’t say anything carelessly. But, no matter how much better my opponents are, I’ll win my way, alongside my Knight.”

At the part about her Knight, Emilia tugged at Subaru’s sleeve and puffed up her chest. Looking at that face from the side, Subaru exhaled a long sigh.

Emilia: “We might be greenhorns, but we won’t lose!”

Subaru: “Who even says «greenhorn» these days… Ouch! It hurts!”

Emilia pinched Subaru’s arm for making fun of her, so he quickly bounced away to escape the punishment. Looking at the two’s behavior, Julius and Anastasia’s expressions relaxed.

Especially Julius, who looked to have dropped his air of self-reflection.

Julius: “…Sometimes, I truly do feel afraid of you two. How much is an act, and how much is genuine, I can never tell.”

Subaru: “My case aside, Emilia-tan is always serious. That’s what makes her so cute, right?”

Julius: “I shall take it to heart.”

As Julius pulled in his chin, the derailed conversation came to the final station along the track. Instead, Anastasia clapped to bring everyone back on topic.

Anastasia: “Anyway, bringin’ it back to where we were… We’re short on people, so there was talk of bringin’ others from the outside, right?”

Julius: “Yes, that is so. Right now, as there are few things to worry regarding the Sand Dunes, I believe it possible to bring a large investigation team into the Tower. It would not only help with solving the mystery of this Library, but also further in as we go above…”

Anastasia: “That’s right, but I’m feelin’ a tad bit anxious.”

Julius: “Anxious, you say?”

Cutting off Julius’s fervent speech, Anastasia nodded. Julius frowned as she raised her finger to point.

Anastasia: “I’d welcome an increase in helpin’ hands, been wonderin’ ‘bout that myself. Going ‘round this Library’s takin’ a toll on my neck. Ya know, I’m small and all, so it’s a real pain.”

She spoke as she rubbed her nape,

Anastasia: “But, in the first place, I’m wonderin’ if it’s possible to even fit a lotta people into the Tower.”

Julius: “————”

Anastasia: “Thinkin’ ‘bout what’s in it for the other party’s one of the basics of business. Well, I might be callin’ it basics of business, but it’ll come in handy no matter where ya are in life. So, let’s start thinkin’ along those lines.”

Julius: “Think about where the other party stands? But, who would that be?”

Anastasia: “The one who built this Tower, set up the Examinations, and left behind Shaula-san… That one. Let’s think ‘bout bein’ in his shoes for a moment. Ya’ll see.”

Subaru: “That, his personality’s crap?”

Anastasia: “Yup, think he’s completely outta it.”

As Subaru’s lips twisted, Anastasia nodded in affirmation.

Upon hearing those words, the always-serious Emilia and Julius became stiff. But, with how twisted Subaru and Anastasia’s personalities were, they both seemed to be in perfect sync.

Anastasia’s opinion seemed to be plausible. If so, a person with awful personality really did try to raise the difficulty of conquering the Tower.

Subaru: “Shaula! I’ve got something to ask. Come here.”

Shaula: “Master? Aye, aye, coming right away!!”

Once Shaula had been beckoned from the other side of the large bookcase, he got an enthusiastic response, followed straight away by the vision of a figure hopping high in the air. Shaula's.

Arms outstretched, her long ponytail waving in the air, she grinned as she jumped towards Subaru's chest——

Shaula: "Ma—s—ter!"

Subaru: "Nope."

Shaula: "Ughyah—!"

With a nimble step, Subaru dodged the incoming glomp.

However, as Shaula was unable to stop her impetus, she dove face-first onto the floor, her arms splayed across. She quickly turned to shoot a glare at him.

Shaula: "Uuuuu, Master is seriously mean[84]."

Subaru: "No, no, I didn't move away because it was you, but because you were gonna crash into me full force, so my reflexes kicked in."

Shaula: "So you'll let me hug you if I come at you slowly!?"

Subaru: "Eh? Don't wanna, though."

Shaula: "Why not! What part of me is lacking! Even though I look this glamorous! Even though I'm this *darashinonai*[85]!"

Subaru: "You're *darashinonai*, huh… Then that's why."

Whining at the top of her voice, Shaula boo-ed at Subaru's cold attitude. And, while she pouted, two small girls came around from where she had jumped.

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[84] The way Shaula said "Master is seriously mean" is, in its original form, "お師様マジいけず", read "oshi-sama maji ikezu", which sounds very similar to Subaru's own "Emilia-tan maji X" (EMX) pattern.

[85] Engrish flip. Means "sluttish/slutty" (だらしのない), originally "ビッチ" (bitchy).

Beatrice and Meili, foregoing their appearance, were an uncommon pairing indeed.

As if noticing Subaru's thoughts through his gaze, or maybe having realized it on her own, Beatrice put a bit more distance between herself and Meili.

Beatrice behaved that way with Petra as well, even though they were around the same age (outwardly). She maintained a clear line between herself and Meili.

Of course, it would be impossible for her to treat Petra and Meili in the same way. Petra was an ally from the same Camp, while Meili was originally sent as an assassin from somewhere, who was even involved in the burning of the Forbidden Library and the Roswaal mansion.

Subaru: "If you keep shying away from people like that, you're never gonna make friends, you know."

Beatrice: "What are you spouting all of a sudden, I suppose. Anyway, Shaula disappeared in the middle of talking, so we quietly came back, in fact."

Subaru: "Ahhh, I ruined the convo over there, my bad, my bad. Well, did you guys find anything good?"

Beatrice: "…There was nothing in particular, I suppose. And, thinking back, it might've not even been worth calling it a conversation, in fact. Yup, that's all that was, I suppose."

Subaru: "——?"

Snapping away her face, Beatrice cut off answering Subaru's question.

Before the alienated Subaru could further question her cold response, Shaula had gotten back to her usual self. She stood upright by the strength of her abs alone and,

Shaula: "Well, Master being mean isn't anything new. I can pull myself together alone. Getting back up fast is one of my selling points."

Julius: "That, alongside your cooperation, Miss Shaula, is something that aids us. By the way, may I ask something?"

Shaula: "What's up? I'll warn you beforehand, I won't fall for someone who's not Master."

Julius: “I admit that you are an attractive woman, but I am afraid that I must take a rain check on an invitation for dinner for now—— I would like to ask and confirm a few things about this Tower.”

Julius elegantly added in a few sweet words but tastefully avoided the topic altogether. This surprised Shaula, who lauded herself as being stubborn as a bitch[86]. As she was not expecting such an answer, her eyes widened, something that was very unlike her usual self, and meekly gave a “Um, sure”.

Julius: “My thanks. Then I begin. Firstly… Do you know the location of the stairs to the Second Floor?”

Shaula: “The stairs to the Second Floor Electra? No clue. Never went up beyond the Fourth. So don’t know.”

Julius: “That by itself is quite the shocking statement.”

If she was to be trusted, then Shaula had been at the Watchtower for about four-hundred years.

If, within that time, she had not once gone off to explore the Tower she lived in, but instead focused on keeping the Sand Dunes under her observation, then she was just too loyal to the one she followed.

Frankly, Subaru felt very conflicted about being mistaken for that same Master.

Anastasia: “Julius, lemme interrupt for a moment.”

This time, replacing her Knight was Anastasia. Standing in front of her, Anastasia’s light-blue eyes reflected Shaula’s figure.

Anastasia: “Shaula-san’s position’s that, right? To be accurate, you’re the keeper of the Watchtower… No, of Great Library Pleiades, right?”

Shaula: “Eeexactly~.”

Anastasia: “I see. Then, according to my calculation… Four, no, five?”

[86] A bit of a wordplay, since “ビッチ” can mean both its literal reading, “bitch(y)”, or “slut(ty)”.

Anastasia lifted her right hand up to display five fingers. Shaula, who could not grasp what she was getting at, simply stared down at her and blinked. However,

Anastasia: "——The secret rules Shaula-san was told to keep to protect the Tower, there's five of 'em, right?"

Shaula: "————"

Anastasia beamed widely as Shaula fell silent, coming at a loss for words for the first time.

As the two stared at one another's eyes, all it took was but a slight jerk of her shoulders to tell Anastasia that she was completely correct.

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Shaula: "In the first place, I wasn't really hiding anything. I just didn't say anything because I wasn't asked. I want that on paper, please."

Subaru: "Just spit everything out already."

While Anastasia brought her secret-keeping to light, it was Subaru who crushed what few excuses Shaula was trying to make.

In response to his forced demeanor, Shaula pressed the tip of her fingers together and answered,

Shaula: "Like, for example, if Master and everyone secretly tried to get out of the Tower, I'd have to kill everyone, no mercy."

Subaru: "The hell, what's with you suddenly!?"

Shaula: "I wouldn't do it because I wanted to! We're just talking about what-ifs. In the first place, I can't even go against that order."

At the sudden revelation of hostile intentions, Subaru intently stared at Shaula, who shrunk back as she shook her head. Her bountiful chest pressed against her knees, she cradled herself into a ball.

Shaula: “I can’t even kill you in the first place, Master. I’d get killed before that even happens, and it’ll be over with that, so the whole order’s messed up…”

Subaru: “If you’re really that against it, why not just, not do it…? Unless, wait, you’re not gonna say it’s a Contract, right?”

Feeling something off, Subaru brought those words to his lips, directing them at Shaula.

In the first place, if one thought about Shaula’s identity, then it would be very clear. For four-hundred years, she lived at the Tower, standing guard over the Witch’s Sealing Shrine as the Tower’s keeper in place of the Sage.

Given such a role, and actually having acted upon it for the past several centuries—— neither her lifestyle nor her lifespan were that of an human.

Subaru: “You, are you a Spirit just like Beako?”

In lieu of a fake promise, Beatrice had been locked up inside of the Forbidden Library for four-hundred years.

If, just like her, Shaula had spent the past four-hundred years shooting down any who dared approach the Watchtower, waiting for those who would fulfill the conditions, then possibly, she and Beatrice were the same kind of existence———

Shaula: “No way. Not gonna stand being compared to those fluff-ball things called Spirits. I absolutely refuse… Everyone’s eyes are looking pretty scary suddenly!”

Subaru: “That’s because eighty-percent of everyone present here is related to Spirits!”

As it stood, counting the amateur as well, there were three Spiritual Arts Users. Furthermore, one particular young girl was a Spirit herself, and another who was possessed by an Artificial Spirit herself. The only ones unrelated to Spirits were the Oni sisters who waited downstairs, and the small girl who was looking at Shaula with a mischievous expression for some reason, Meili.

None of what Shaula said had sat well most with those who were present. However,

Subaru: “Let’s leave that at that, anyway, what the hell are you. If you’re not a Spirit, then I don’t see why you’d so desperately keep up your Contract.”

Emilia: “What are you saying, Subaru? Even if you are not a Spirit or a Spiritual Arts User, if you make a promise, you have to keep it. Promises are important. Now, repeat after me.”

Subaru: “No, wait, that was my bad just now. It was just a figure of speech and…”

Emilia: “Promises are important. Three times.”

Subaru: “Promises are important. Promises are important. Promises are important.”

Getting unexpectedly rebuked by Emilia, he repeated her words three times to get forgiveness.

Either way, both Emilia’s and Subaru’s unwitting charade, and Shaula’s strictly obstinate attitude, were difficult to understand by outsiders.

It was not simply a matter of messed up sense of duty, too.

Julius: “Right now, what is important is to learn more about the orders Miss Shaula has received. It is a bad habit of yours to derail the conversation. Be aware of it.”

Subaru: “Like all of it’s my fault… Fine! That was my bad, all of it was my bad! I’ll admit it was my fault, so just leave it at that, damn you!”

Shaula: “Wow, that’s totally a big outburst, but that’s just expected of Master! I’ll talk.”

To Subaru who approached with a pathetic and sour face, Shaula beamed and dealt her hand. Then, she cleared her throat, and in a strangely decent manner, “Now then”, she opened her mouth,

Shaula: “I humbly present that, I will now speak of the orders I was given. First, I am to never let the challengers of the Great Library Pleiades leave.”

Subaru: “We’re suddenly stuck here!”

Shaula: “It’s alright! There’s a proper way out! As long as you properly clear the Great Library’s Examinations, and reach the First Floor Maia, there’s no problem. All’s *daijobu*[87].”

Shaula said as she gave a thumbs-up.

Shaula: “By the way, if this condition is violated, then I’ll turn into a cold-blooded *satsujin kikai*[88] pretty quick, so it’ll invalidate my promise with Master. I’ll get in the way.”

Subaru: “That’s got a bigger priority than my promise, huh? Kinda hurts.”

Shaula: “Ohhh, to think I’ve managed to hurt Master, I must’ve gotten stronger~! This is clearly an evolution! The fruits of four-hundred years!”

Subaru: “I’m joking!”

Shaula: “Me too~!”

After indulging in the fast back and forth, Shaula raised a second finger and waved around her hand and spoke, “Moving on”,

Shaula: “Well, I’m getting tired of this, so I’ll rush it. First, it’s forbidden to leave without completing the Examinations. Second, it’s forbidden to violate the rules of the Examinations. Third, it’s forbidden to disrespect the Libraries. Fourth, it’s forbidden to do anything which causes destruction to the Tower itself. Fifth, ahhhh, fifth was… Oh. There’s no fifth.”

Emilia: “All of that makes four rules… But.”

Somewhat taking in Shaula and her butchered explanation, Emilia turned towards Subaru and the others. The anxieties and fears she embraced, were ones Subaru understood too.

The rules Shaula spoke of were, roughly, easy to stand by, but there were several curious statements mixed in. The problem was especially with——

[87] Engrish flip. Means “(it’s) okay/alright” (大丈夫), originally “OK”.

[88] Engrish flip. Means “killing machine” (殺人機械), originally “キリングマシーン” (killing machine). As a fun fact, the Japanese expression used here is actually the localization of a music album’s title.

Subaru: “I’m really curious about the «It’s forbidden to violate the rules of the Examinations» bit.”

Julius: “Seems like it is a hidden rule we were unaware of.”

Julius agreed with Subaru, who touched his chin, lost in thought.

At least, during the Examination of the Third Floor, Taygeta, Subaru and the others had not received any information about the rules, and had not faced any problems with the Monolith and its asterism.

Speaking of which, the moment anyone touched the wrong Monolith, they were disqualified.

Anastasia: “Rules, regulations… they all sorta sound like bad news, at least to me.”

Emilia: “…Back then, the Trials from the Tomb would close down for the day if the challenger failed to pass it. It somewhat seems quite similar to how we redid the Examination from earlier, so maybe——”

Emilia stopped herself at that point, and bit her lip. Her trembling purple eyes darted to Subaru, who gave a slight nod.

Subaru: “If you’ve got anything on your mind, now’s the best time to speak up. Don’t worry, I won’t make fun of you, no matter what you say.”

Emilia: “Mhm, I know. Um, you see, Subaru and Anastasia-san were saying that, the person who made this Tower is reaaally mean… right?”

Subaru: “Your choice of words is turning pretty cute, but that’s right. What about it?”

Emilia: “Thinking from the point of view of the other party is also important. In other words, if you try to look at what Shaula said, while imagining how that reaaally mean person felt, it’s kinda like——”

As everyone’s gazes turned to Emilia, she licked her lips, then she clapped together her hands, and pointed to the ceiling.

Emilia: “There are rules we have to follow, but we don’t know what those rules are… That’s really mean, isn’t it?”

Subaru: “…In other words.”

Emilia: “We have to imagine what could be the possible rules, and go on without breaking them.”

Everyone: “———”

Everyone’s faces tightened with anxiety at Emilia’s words. To their response, Emilia’s long eyelashes fringed as she looked down.

Emilia: “I feel like, Echidna would do something like this.”

Subaru: “…Emilia-tan, to think we’d think of the same person when it comes to crappy personalities. We think alike.”

That one sentence lent a bit more credibility to Subaru’s own thoughts, at the very least.

The owner of the malicious personality Emilia mentioned—— He felt it was close to being right.

Establishing rules that were not meant to be broken, but not telling the challenger themselves the contents of the rules.

It was quite the distasteful disposition.

Subaru: “By the way, are you the one who’s going to judge whether the rules are broken or not?”

Shaula: “You’re coming to get the hang of it. All the stuff I just said, I’m supposed to just get it if there’s any violation of them. Absolutely no way to trick me. Goes for both Master, and his friends.”

The meek voice expressed a mysterious power in the latter half of her words.

That was not the physical prowess of Shaula, but rather the opposite.

——That there was an existence much stronger than Shaula, who could make her act like that.

Subaru: “It was already a bad joke, but now another bad joke got piled on top of it. Too late anyway.”

Julius: “At times, I feel envious of the frivolous way you speak.”

Julius sighed as he spoke. Looking at his handsome profile, Subaru shrugged.

Julius: “Perhaps it is because of how you are always looking up, that you developed such a persona. If that is so, then I am afraid I will never be able to gain such an experience.”

Subaru: “You need to be more afraid of what’s around your feet. You’ll stub your toe on the corner of a desk. I really hope you do.”

Anastasia: “Yes, yes, good friends getting into arguin’s fine ‘n all, but let’s not be forgettin’ the main topic.”

Barging between Julius and Subaru, Anastasia stepped up to gaze down upon Shaula.

Anastasia: “That’s all there is? There ain’t anythin’ besides that, right?”

Shaula: “Cross my heart. Not lying this time. Besides, so long as the rules aren’t broken, my body’s still gonna be mine. No wait, that’s wrong. It’ll still be Master’s.”

Subaru: “Don’t want it.”

Shaula: “I got rejected! But, my heart’s always with Master!”

Subaru: “Don’t want that either.”

Hands on her waist, Anastasia reconfirmed everything Shaula had spoken of in short, with a few unnecessary words added by Shaula, alongside her own position in recent events. It took a while, but she managed to confirm that Subaru’s promise with her—— To not harm him or his comrades, remained intact, and she planned on keeping it.

Of course, with the condition that none of the rules went unbroken.

Emilia: “Either way, to think we can’t get out unless we complete the Examinations… It’s coming to look pretty similar to the Trials from back at the Tomb.”

Subaru: “Nah, worst-case scenario, so long as we beat this here, we all get to go home, right? That’s a lot easier than the one at the Tomb.”

Shaula: “Master would never do anything like that! He was the kindest ever! Had the biggest heart ever! Uwah, my body’s itchy because I lied!”

Shaula fluttered around, reaping what she sowed, as Emilia and Subaru looked on with disappointed expressions.

For the time being, that was all they got from Shaula.

Meili: “Are you all finished talking? Can I go get on the naked onee-san now?”

Subaru: “We’re done, we’re done. Go ahead. Do what you want. Wait, you’ve already gotten super attached to her.”

Judging that the talk was over, Meili, who had been staying out of the conversation, ran up to Shaula and climbed on top of her thin shoulders.

That was the place Meili felt most comfortable, ever since arriving at the Tower. To Shaula, who had lifted the dragon carriage like it was no big deal, Meili ought to be as light as a feather.

Meili: “Whenever I’m with onee-san, I feel kinda safer.”

Shaula: “Well, I don’t think much of it. I can look after ankle-biter number two just fine.”

Subaru: “Number two?”

Shaula: “Ankle-biter number two’s this one here, and number one is that one over there.”

With Meili still on her back, Shaula pointed to Beatrice as number one.

Beatrice made no comment on Shaula’s belittling remark. Normally, considering her personality, she would have snapped at her at full force, face red and puffy.

Subaru: “Wait a sec, she hasn’t been talking for a while now. Is everything okay?”

Beatrice: “————”

Subaru: “Beako? Oy, Beatrice. Pay attention, come on. I’ll kiss your forehead if you don’t.”

Beatrice: “…Do what you want, in fact.”

Subaru: “————”

As if barely listening, Beatrice answered Subaru's words. Finding it unamusing, Subaru frowned. And then,

Subaru: "Mwah——"

Beatrice: "Ngyahhh, I suppose!?"

Feeling somewhat annoyed, he really kissed her forehead. Immediately, Beatrice came to her senses, covered her forehead and leapt away. Then tripped. Then got up. Then tripped again.

Subaru: "You're overreacting…"

Beatrice: "Wh-wh-wh-what are you doing all of a sudden, in fact!? Your train of thought makes no sense, I suppose!"

Subaru: "My train of thought makes perfect sense. I even got permission from you. Are you really okay?"

Feeling a little hurt at how she desperately scrubbed the part where he had kissed, Subaru worried about the little girl.

Putting in a little thought, this Tower, a place with a shady backstory, was in the middle of the Sand Dunes. Subaru did not understand it very well, but there was some kind of Miasma flowing through here, so that might be the cause.

Subaru: "If you're not feeling good, just hold my hand. You get better that way, right."

Beatrice: "That's impossible, it won't happen, in fact! Give me a little time to calm down, I suppose!"

Her face beet-red, Beatrice squealed at Subaru, so he turned away with a shrug. That she refused to hold hands came as a bit of a shock, but the rest of her attitude was that of her usual self.

If there was something really worrying about her, he would just ask again later.

Subaru: "Now then, the problem is…"

Julius: "That in the end, we have no choice but to fumble through the unknown in search of the stairs to the Second Floor, is it."

Julius finished Subaru's sentence as the two turned to face the bookcases once more.

The reason they looked a bit down was that, they required a bit more manpower to tackle this, but because of the orders Shaula had been given, they had to relinquish the thought.

If they did not clear the Examinations, they would not be allowed to get out of the Tower. Naturally, one could not go out to beyond the Sand Dunes to call for help.

Ultimately, there was no choice but to continue the search with the members present.

Subaru: "Will you get it if I say, «It's like looking for a single grain of gold in a mountain of sand»?"

Julius: "Speaking in such poetic words is unlike you. However, I can honestly agree with them."

Rare as it was, faced with the great hurdle that obstructed them, Subaru and Julius got along.

Nothing could be accomplished by dawdling, so they prepared to dive once more into the sea of books to find a way to the next floor, or so they had decided when,

Emilia: "Hey, I put a little thought into it."

Emilia interrupted the two who were going back into the Library with a slightly raised hand.

She tilted her head towards them, put a finger to her lips, and spoke,

Emilia: "I thought about how the person who built this Tower, his personality is a little dishonest, right?"

Subaru: "Your word choice is turning adorable again, but that's right. So?"

Putting together everything that was discussed from the previous conversation, Emilia added "So," and continued,

Emilia: "The staircase, I think it might just be at that place——"

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Subaru: “I’ll say it again. The guy who made this Tower has the shittiest personality ever!!”

Standing in front of the long and winding staircase that led to the Second Floor Electra, Subaru spat out various colors of abuse.

The staircase that led to the Second Floor, the location which Emilia had thought of, was——

Emilia: “I thought it’d be in places where we hadn’t looked, like maybe on the Fourth or Fifth Floors.”

Emilia spoke, feeling elated, yet somewhat perplexed.

Her guess had hit the nail squarely on its head. The staircase to the Second Floor had appeared right beside the Green Room, where Rem and Ram were waiting, in a previously empty space.

Arc 6 Chapter 25 – The Man who Waits on the Second Floor Electra

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 4 “Stick Swinger”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Hedge) — Complete

——A woman, a sole woman existed.

Oppressed was the woman; by her family, her clan, by her race who should have loved her. All saw her with disdain, all ostracized her.

Prior to being born, expectations were laid upon that woman. Alas, her birth turned her traitor to them.

What remained was dejection and disappointment, what was bestowed upon her was only scorn and ridicule. Those were the sole possessions of the woman.

There existed a dearest wish of her clan. To bring back the symbol of their former glory and prosperity, the second coming of the founder whom they labelled their God.

All kinds of secret arts and all types of inhumane atrocities, unfathomable, the number of taboos committed, all of their fruits amounted to the woman.

However, the birth of that woman betrayed their dearest wish, and the clan abandoned the woman with disappointment and despair.

Clansmen: “Go somewhere and live and die. For that is your sin.”

Abandoned by her family, by her race, she was released into the fields as a child. Cast away with no means of survival, the child was not supposed to survive.

However, even if she lacked means of survival, she possessed the strength to survive.

Ironically enough, it was the feast of what betrayed the dearest wish of the clan, the taboos and offenses they had committed.

Unknown to words, lacking all wisdom, merely abiding by her instincts, the woman survived to live a long life in the fields.

Killing beasts, sipping on their lifeblood, crawling on the earth, tasting muddy water.

Before a long time passed, the child became a young girl, the young girl became a woman, and it became difficult to live in the fields.

Hearing the rumors of a woman laying waste to the mountains as if she were a beast, men aimed for that life, and the woman was captured.

The captured woman appeared beautiful, the men abstained from taking away her life, and proceedingly, the woman was kept by them. While becoming compliant towards the men, gradually the woman's consciousness descended onto a human environment from the fields.

Losing the indispensability of struggling to survive, exposed to the desires of the men, days of merely living.

Eventually the woman, upon the bed, came to acquire things unacquainted from the men.

Words, wisdom, way of life, and emotions.

Eventually her treatment altered, conferred with things to adorn her body, the woman was treated like a precious jewel.

Among those days, the woman embraced queer thoughts for the men.

Whether that was something resembling gratitude or obligation, the woman then had no lead to understand that.

While embracing those thoughts, the woman snapped the necks of all the men dwelling in the residence.

Easily, in one breath, without making them suffer, in an instant, grouping them all together, she consigned them to oblivion.

Sneaking away from the residence, proceeding towards the fields, lacking all doubt, the woman returned to her own hometown.

The woman attained queer thoughts regarding the race residing there, the clan possessing the same blood as her, the people who had bodies distantly larger than hers.

That they were feelings of hatred and desire for revenge, the woman then did not realize.

Merely, their weeps and wails, voices begging for forgiveness were quite thrilling. For the first time, the woman smiled from the bottom of her heart.

Woman: “Fall apart here and die an unsightly death—— Because that is your sin, you see.”

For the sake of attaining that felicity, from one after the other, the woman pulverized the dearest wish of her race, her blood relatives, her clan by herself.

Politely and courteously, not leaving a single one, not sparing a single one, taking her time, one-by-one, with certainty.

Before long, once her race had died out, once anything and everything had come to an end, the woman returned to the residence where she had lived with the men.

Though she had abandoned the corpses of her race, she buried all the corpses of the men courteously.

And once merely she alone was left in the residence, the woman took a deep, deep breath.

That was relaxation, tranquility, the woman, for the first time, experienced utter bliss.

Nobody would interfere with her now. Thinking and taking action, both lay in futility, so she would merely fall asleep.

——The Witch of Sloth continued to indulge in everlasting inactivity, untiring peace.

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——The stairway that led to the Second Floor Electra ought to be called the Great Stairway, because of its grand presence.

Compared to the spiral stairway used to get from the Sixth Floor to the Fifth Floor and furthermore to the Fourth, the Great Stairway was much much wider, and much much longer.

As it took the space of an entire room, the intimidating feel it gave off was a given. What was supposed to be an empty room, was now the Great Stairway.

With it in front, Subaru folded his arms and sighed. Then——

Subaru: “It kinda feels like it’s been a long time since we last came here.”

Emilia: “Eh? We just found the stairway. What’s wrong all of a sudden?”

Emilia’s eyes widened with surprise at Subaru’s remark.

Subaru shook his head signaling “No”, and turned to his companions, with whom he had experienced the general nastiness the creator of the Tower gave off.

He recollected a bit of peace at the sight of their unchanged faces.

Beatrice: “——? Subaru, why are you wrapping your fingers around Betty’s, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Kinda wanted to feel like I’m really here… Ahem, I’m good. My bad.”

Faced with a rising suspicion in her face, Subaru forced a smile at Beatrice, but still kept her hand in his. Then, he turned around and pointed to the Great Stairway behind him.

Subaru: “Now then, getting back on track… The Great Stairway was always here, and no one just really noticed, is not what the case is here, right?”

Julius: “I believe it is quite unthinkable to have not noticed such an obvious spectacle—— However, if it were to be limited to only this room, then I cannot deny that possibility.”

Subaru: “Say what?”

Anastasia: “A sense of incongruity while explorin’, huh? I get that.”

Taking Subaru's doubt in stride, the master-vassal duo of Anastasia and Julius nodded in agreement. Seeing that, Subaru tilted his head slightly, while Emilia raised her hand with a "Yes",

Emilia: "About back when Subaru was still sleeping, we all gathered at the Fourth Floor. Rem and Patrasche were resting in the Green Room, and we were challenging the puzzle on the Third Floor, so, we were walking around to see where we could put our luggage…"

Beatrice: "We were all unconsciously avoiding this room, in fact. Looking back…"

Subaru: "Perhaps there was something akin to cognitive disruption keeping us away from it, is that what you're saying?"

What Emilia started was continued by Beatrice, while Subaru brought it to its conclusion. Both Emilia and Beatrice nodded to that theory, and Anastasia and Julius agreed to it.

Once the Great Stairway was discovered, everyone thought about the room, and noticed the cognitive disruption—— If that were the case, then maybe the Great Stairway was always present in this room, and there was some kind of magic that camouflaged it so it could not be noticed.

Subaru: "Well, if not for that, when we finished solving the slab puzzle of the Third Floor, if there was anyone in this room, they might've gotten flattened by the sudden appearance of the stairs."

Julius: "Subaru, it is not a slab, but a Monolith. Let us refer to it the same way. I would like to avoid confusion."

Subaru: "Monolith, Monolith, Monolith! Satisfied? Let's continue."

Although Julius looked dissatisfied with Subaru's apathetic response, Subaru was fed up with it, so he ignored him. He turned to the two who had not taken part in the conversation till now—— Shaula, who was playing around beside the stairway, and Meili, who was on her back.

Shaula: "Hmm? Something up, Master? Ah! Could it be, it's my turn to be useful!? I'll do anything for Master! I'll even become your co-signer!"

Subaru: “You, you don’t get what you’re saying at all, do you! That’s not something you should become, even if it’s your mom, dad, sibling or even friend telling you to do it. Just in case, I’ll ask, so, about this staircase, did you know…”

Shaula: “Definitely, I’ve been living here for a few hundred years now… but this is the first time I’m seeing these stairs!”

Subaru: “Meili, it’s fine to play around. Pull on the scorpiontail hard.”

Meili: “I’d do it even if you don’t tell me, onii-san.”

Shaula: “It hurts it hurts it hurtsss.”

As usual, Shaula was useless when it came to conquering the Tower. Leaving it to Meili to punish her accordingly, Subaru looked up to the Great Stairway again.

Unlike the pair that led up to the Fourth Floor, the Great Stairway was not spiral-shaped. Normally, a stairway would be a singular path leading up to the next floor. However, for this particular one to cross the Third Floor, and lead directly to the Second, was something that would look weird for the Tower, given its shape. One would think that, subsequently, the structure would cause the floor to protrude outside of the Tower——

Subaru: “Maybe it’s making up for that using the power of mystery…”

Emilia: “Or maybe it just looks like it leads up to the Second Floor, but it goes to a completely different place… Would that be too mean?”

Subaru: “I’m scared that Emilia-tan’s pureness will get tainted by the Tower creator’s awful personality. I wanna conquer this place faster.”

Emilia: “——?”

Emilia tilted her head to the side, not quite understanding. However, it was Emilia who found this Great Stairway, and it was also her who uncovered an important hint in solving the mystery of the Third Floor.

The building called Pleiades Watchtower, or rather, Great Library Pleiades, had a number of very nasty gimmicks that reflected the designer’s personality.

While being very reliable with her solving obstacles one after another, Subaru, who wanted to spend his days in peace with her, worried that her personality might get twisted because of this.

Subaru: “Saying that, our pace’s been pretty nice so far. I cleared the Third Floor’s Examination on my first try, and we’re already one third done with conquering the Tower in under just three days too.”

Beatrice: “Compared to how there was no progress in four-hundred years, this would be a great pace, I suppose.”

Subaru: “It’s pretty damn lit, thinking that way… But then, I’m the kinda amazing guy who’s moving forward history that’s been stalling for the past hundreds of years. As a history-mover, my power word game’s strong.”

In the recent past, he had gathered the participants in the White Whale subjugation, crushed the Witch Cult’s Sin Archbishop of Sloth and annihilated the Great Rabbit, helped partly in clearing the Trials at the Tomb of the Witch of Greed, defeated the Sin Archbishop of Greed, and finally, set foot on the never-before explored Pleiades Watchtower, cleared one of its never-before challenged Examinations and was now on the way to challenging the second of those Examinations——

Subaru: “If I’m just listing all my achievements and skip the process, I’ll only look like an idiot…”

He had died several times to accomplish all that, so at the same time, he could not exactly puff his chest. Despite that, history had indeed advanced a bit too far in the past year.

He had not intended this, but at the very least, he had to settle things with the Sin Archbishops of Gluttony and Lust both, so the world better be prepared for it—— was how he felt about the matter.

Subaru: “Wha-what? What’s up, Emilia-tan, holding my hand suddenly. Something wrong?”

Emilia: “…No, no. It’s just, I think Subaru should be a little, little bit nicer to himself.”

Subaru: “Yeah, no, you’ll have a hard time finding someone who’s as soft on himself as me. It’s enough with Emilia-tan and Beako, any more’s just too much.”

Rem would be added to that list, whenever she woke up. She would be a bit strict, but kind, nonetheless.

And adding Petra, Patrasche, Garfiel and even Otto to that would leave no room for Subaru to go easy on himself.

Emilia: "————"

Emilia's lips shook faintly, as if trying to search for some way to respond to him, but she only kept on looking at Subaru, unable to find the words.

The force in her grip on his hand increasing ever so slightly, Subaru cocked his head. However——

Anastasia: "At this point, I think this here's a problem of the root of Natsuki-kun's bein'. It's not somethin' that'll get better in a day or two. I suppose it depends on how Emilia-san goes 'bout it, tho'."

Breaking into the conversation with a clap of her hands, Anastasia shot a glance at Emilia. Emilia looked back, her expression earnest, but it seemed to not be the reaction the former had intended, so,

Anastasia: "——My, I feel like there's very lil' hope for that. Not that it'd suit'cha."

Emilia: "——? I don't think I understand, but if you show me how, I'll try my best?"

Anastasia: "I'm afraid I'll have to refuse… I'm not too fond of gettin' kicked by a ground dragon."

Subaru: "Getting kicked by a ground dragon… I wonder if it means something like getting kicked by a horse."

Setting aside Garfiel's weird phrases, Subaru added in a new phrase that might be common in this different world.

In any case, for Subaru, that was not the end of the confusing info being thrown around in Emilia and Anastasia's conversation. At one point, he and Emilia both kept tilting their heads at every other line, to the point that Anastasia sighed, and pointed to the Great Stairway.

Anastasia: "Heeey, when are we goin' to quit dawdlin' and move on up? Whatever's waitin' might be harder than the Third Floor… Or maybe Natsuki-kun'll end up clearin' it right away."

Subaru: "To tell you the truth, if it's something as annoying as the puzzle on the Third Floor, I'm not feeling too hot about it."

To be honest, the only reason Subaru had been able to clear the Third Floor Taygeta's Examination was because knowledge about stars and constellations was critical to clearing it.

Constellations—— That too, knowledge from Subaru's original world, was required to solve the puzzle. In fact, Subaru believed that the constructor of this Tower was from another world, modern times at that too, just like him.

In that respect, it was highly likely that the Second Floor's Examination required modern knowledge as well, where Subaru's presence would prove useful, but——

Subaru: "Things might be different compared to the Third Floor, I mean, I can't do much if it's something I don't know. The name Flugel's Germanic, and I dunno much about Germany's history anyway."

A vague anxiety swirled in him, but he could not voice it, so to keep everyone's expectations. In both Emilia and Beatrice's eyes, Subaru was weak.

Thus, he wanted to do whatever was possible by dragging out whatever little knowledge he had of Germany.

Subaru: "——Can't help it. The stairs up are literally right in front. I can't call myself a man if I step back now. Let's just pop in there and breeze through the challenge."

Julius: "Unfortunately, aside from you and I, there are only women here."

Subaru: "It's just a saying, don't put a damper on it, you! Alright, let's go, Beako!"

Beatrice: "Ngyahhh, in fact!"

Julius dowsed the burning spirit Subaru had in his clenched fist, but Subaru simply stuck his tongue out toward him, pulled Beatrice into his arms, and ran straight up the stairs.

Emilia: "Ah, Subaru, wait!"

Seeing his enthusiastic jump up, Emilia clambered behind him, while Julius and Anastasia slumped their shoulders in unison, and followed after.

Meili: "Naked onee-san? Aren't you going?"

Shaula: “Yap it with the naked already, ankle-biter number two. I’m properly clothed, you see. I’ve got an *ero-kawaii*[89] thing going on, see. Master chose this for me, so stop complaining about it.”

Meili: “I’m not really complaining, you knooow~. Just hurry up, come on, come on, or we’ll get left behind.”

Shaula: “You’re really bossy even though you’re just riding on my back, ankle-biter. I’ll tell on you to Master later! Actually, I want to just teach you some manners myself~!”

Shaula put her foot on the stairs as she shook her reddened face, scorpiontail flailing about. With vigor unseeming for a person carrying someone on their back, she jumped from the first step of the Great Stairway, to the fifth, and kept running.

Shaula: “Dadadadadadadadada–!”

Ignoring what was happening behind himself, Subaru kept on running up the stairs with Beatrice in his arms. In the middle of it, Beatrice had skillfully changed her position to that of a princess carry and narrowed her blue eyes at Subaru.

Beatrice: “As I thought, there is something tweaking the sense of space here, I suppose. We haven’t gotten out of the Tower even though we came so far in a straight line, in fact.”

Subaru: “Maybe we couldn’t just tell from the outside, but the Tower might really be shaped like that too.”

Beatrice: “For just this one stairway to be jutting out? If that was so, then there needs to be something that makes the Tower look Tower-like, otherwise, there is no point in hiding the stairway, in fact.”

Subaru: “I guess so. I just felt like saying it out loud.”

Subaru sighed as he agreed with Beatrice’s reasoning and looked overhead.

Strangely enough, even though he was running up the stairs, the floor above seemed no closer than before. No matter how much he ran, it felt like he was going up using an escalator going down.

[89] Meaning “sexy and cute”. This is given in Japanese obviously, but since it’s slang, might as well keep it as-is.

Subaru: “No way, to think that the harassment Emilia was talking about would actually happen…”

That there was only a stairway prepared, and it actually did not connect to the Second Floor—— As Subaru gave this theory more thought, the space overhead opened up at the same time.

Subaru: “Oh, oooh——!?”

Beatrice: “Hyah.”

Faced with sudden bright light in the poorly lit stone-cut stairway, Subaru and Beatrice shouted at the same time.

At some point, while continuously moving forward, the stairs had ended, and they had stepped onto a new floor. Which was——

Subaru: “A white room… again, huh.”

Beatrice: “I suppose.”

He stopped and carefully put Beatrice down from the princess carry.

It was a surprisingly long climb up the stairs. Despite his stamina having improved, he could not stop himself from crouching over his knees and breathing heavily.

While stroking his back, Beatrice tapped the floor with the tip of her toe and looked around the room. Subaru gulped and did the same.

To the two who had reached the top of the stairs first, the room was a spitting image of the Third Floor Taygeta’s Examination; a white expanse. A mysterious structure where both the floor and the ceiling extended far beyond the reach of one’s eye, and the basis of distance itself seemed to be skewed.

No doubt the only reason this white space was registered as a place was the small open space on the ground with the stairs leading to the floor below, just like it had been on the Third Floor.

Emilia: “Ah, this room again?”

And from that same open space with the stairs popped up Emilia and the others, all bearing similar reactions to the scenery of white, and all dropped their shoulders in dejection.

It was obvious with the presentation, that another Examination was about to commence.

Subaru: “Any chance we just came to the Third Floor again by mistake?”

Emilia: “I don’t think so. There were fifty-four steps in the stairway between the Fourth and Third Floors. This one here had four-hundred-and-forty-four steps. That’s almost ten times more steps we needed to get here, right?”

Subaru: “Y-you were counting, Emilia-tan?”

Emilia: “Fufu~, the truth is, counting the number of steps is a secret hobby I recently picked up… Why are you patting my head?”

Subaru and the others took turns in patting Emilia’s head after she boasted about her hobby. Even Julius and Meili, who refrained from doing so, looked on with delicate pity.

Emilia: “It somehow feels reaaally weird, you know…”

Subaru: “W-we really couldn’t have done it without Emilia-tan. Thanks to you, we know we’ve gone up ten times higher than the Third Floor. Kinda makes you think that we’ve just jumped way up to the First Floor. I’d like to go with that, but, for now, I think we should consider that this is the Second Floor…”

Beatrice: “The Examination is supposed to begin, in fact. That over there might be how, I suppose.”

Putting away Emilia’s doubts for later, Subaru looked to where Beatrice pointed—— Straight ahead from coming up the stairs, there was a spectacle that caught one’s eye.

On the Third Floor Taygeta, there was something similar in the center of the room. And upon touching it, the Examination would commence. If the case was the same here as well, then——

Julius: “It’s not a Monolith, but—— A sword.”

Narrowing his golden eyes, Julius spoke as he gazed upon It, which stuck out of the ground.

Exactly as he stated, within the white expanse stood not a Monolith like it had been the Third Floor, but It.

——It, was a sword.

Devoid of sheath, the bare sword stood straight, tip pierced into the white floor.

The way it stood absolutely straight, hilt facing up, was a terrifying beauty that reflected in Subaru's eyes.

It was not as if there were gorgeous decorations, nor did Subaru know whether its material was of high quality or not.

Only that, in its non-decorative simpleness, in its making of minimal use of steel, there was something beautiful.

Subaru: "From the looks of it, it's supposed to work like a Sword of Selection…"

Julius: "————"

Anastasia: "Yes, yes, ya were really patient. Good boy, good boy."

Julius held back his words when he noticed the picturesque scene of Subaru whispering to a sword. Putting aside Anastasia's silent praise for Julius who was watching, Subaru set his eyes on Shaula. She had her arms crossed to emphasize her ample bosom, face brimming with confidence.

The kind that read, "You can ask me whatever you want, I'm completely ready to say I have no clue!". So, Subaru, without having asked a word, was forced to finally stepped towards the sword.

Emilia: "Subaru."

Subaru: "I think it's fine. It's not a trap that casts Instant-Death on you, if it's anything like the Third Floor."

Nodding his head to a distressed Emilia, Subaru took a step towards the Sword of Selection. Of course, Emilia and Beatrice tagged along naturally. The rest remained on stand-by at the mouth of the stairs, ready to react in case anything happened.

Subaru: “Careful about making a get-away road for Anastasia. It’s a pretty long way down, so if she trips, she’ll keep on rolling till she dies.”

Julius: “I shall keep it in mind. Rather, you ought to be more mindful of Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama’s warnings.”

Emilia: “It’s okay. I’ll protect Subaru.”

Subaru: “Ahh, alright, I’ll let myself be protected.”

Watching Subaru flashing a thumbs-up to a very enthusiastic Emilia, Julius sighed. After seeing it through, Subaru faced the Sword of Selection in front.

A distance where if he just reached out, he could touch it. At that point, the presence of the sword brought out a certain sense of reality. That, like the Monolith, there was no mysterious feel to it.

Subaru: “That said, it’s a sword that has been stuck here since the Tower was built. That there’s not even a speck of rust on it is itself pretty weird.”

Subaru whispered in front of the Sword of Selection, then took a light breath, breathed out—— then stretched his hand towards the handle.

Wrapping his fingers neatly around it, he felt it was slightly resisting him, but he still put strength into pulling it up.

For a moment, doubt flashed in everyone’s minds about whether Subaru would be able to pull it out, if it truly were the Sword of Selection as its given name implied—— but, the thought turned out to be in vain.

Subaru: “————”

Upon applying the slightest bit of strength, the sharp edge that was stuck in the floor came out easily.

It truly was with as much elegance as a sword could have, as if it were thrust out of its sheath.

At that immediate moment, it echoed.

???: ——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword.”

Subaru: “——Hk!”

A voice that bore through eardrums and resonated directly in their skulls conveyed them the details of the Examination.

It was an expected turn of events, so he had not done something as unsavory as dropping the sword, but it was nonetheless an unpleasant experience.

After all, the voice that echoed in his head was very much like his own.

Subaru: “Feels like getting motion sickness… I guess everyone feels that way too…”

Did everyone hear, or was it limited to Subaru, who had pulled out the sword? Everyone had heard the voice when someone touched the Monolith.

So, this time too—— Subaru turned around with that thought, and noticed.

Everyone: “————”

——That everyone’s breaths were caught, and they were looking at a single point.

Subaru: “————”

Following their line of sight, Subaru also looked. The place they were all looking at was a point further ahead of the Sword of Selection—— At a place that coincidentally equaled the distance between the sword and staircase.

And at that place, the shadowy silhouette of a person had appeared.

Voice: “——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword.”

A voice that was supposed to be whispering, suddenly sounded very loud to Subaru.

A voice that repeated the same words he had heard upon pulling out the sword. However, it was nothing like his own voice that echoed in his head, but undoubtedly was being spoken by the silhouette with a different voice.

Voice: "——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword."

The voice, as if it were an idiot taught to repeat only one sentence, spun the same words again.

Whether the voice seemed mechanical, automatic or even instinctual, could not be determined.

The subtle tremble of the voice was apparent in the repetition of those eerie words. The voice of the silhouette was terribly direct, as if an edge of a sword were tickling the one's heart.

Subaru: "————"

Whether the tremble was from fear, or from passion, or from pleasure, or from grief, could also not be determined. For it to play around with others' emotions so well, was proof that there was a distinct gap between it, and a living creature.

At this distance, from just being a voice, it played with lives.

Voice: "——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword."

——It was a man with simple yet long, red hair, that flowed down his back.

He was quite tall. A full head above Subaru, the man's body was adorned with thick muscles befitting his height.

He wore not armor, but a casual crimson *kinagashi*[90] that contributed nothing in protection—— From his right side down to his arm, his chest lay exposed, and his waist was bound with a white sash.

His flaming red hair reached up to the middle of his back, and his left eye was covered by a shoddy black eye-patch. Finally, the right eye that remained uncovered, was a blue reflection of the unreachable heavens.

Surely, it was of such well-ordered beauty that would make anyone and everyone turn around and take a look, a sight fit for a painting—— That savage, cruel smile filled with insanity, spoiled it all.

[90] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations (from Arc 6 Chapter 26): "I discovered that *kinagashi* is actually the name of that kind of clothing. So I just left it as the reading in romaji. For more information, see here".

It was a most exceedingly beautiful, ferocious beast.

The most beautiful beast that existed in this world—— To the point that Subaru forgot to breathe in its presence.

Shaula: “Hii…”

The illusion of the stillness of time was broken by a soft whisper.

Swiftly he heard a girl’s voice squeak out a ”Kyaa~”. At the edge of his eyes, he saw the figure of the girl whose black hair reached her backside, at his side—— Shaula dropped to the floor, while Meili’s eyes darted around, confused.

Shaula: “Hii, hiii…”

If anything, Shaula was so upset that she could be incontinent.

With her eyes open wide, her face twisted in a way unbefitting a girl as beautiful as her, the depth of the surprise, of the frenzy she felt, was expressed clearly.

If it were possible to leave it to her instincts, she would have stormed out of the room.

Only, her trembling legs did not permit it.

——The very Shaula who had utterly destroyed the Centaur creature, was stiff with fear?

Man: “——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword.”

Even with the frightened Shaula in sight, the voice continued repeating those words.

At first glance, it seemed to be a situation that rose in eeriness levels—— However, there was something else he noticed.

The man did not move a single step, only ever exerting pressure from where he stood—— No, the man did not even try to exude pressure. He simply stood still.

Just by being there, his existence gave off the same presence as that of a Witch.

Subaru: "——Hk."

Holding his breath, he forced his eyelids, that had forgotten to blink, to close and took a moment to calm down.

And then, without taking his eyes off the man for even a second, Subaru took a step backward. In his right hand was the Sword of Selection, in his left was Beatrice's hand held firm, he pulled her stiff form back.

Subaru: "Eh, Emilia…"

Emilia: "I-I know."

Knowing he could not leave her behind, Subaru called out Emilia's name, knowing she was still petrified. Even so, Emilia nodded in response, her voice quivering. Matching his movements with her shaking knees, Subaru shrunk away slowly.

Man: "——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword."

The distance widened. Even so, the man remained unmoving. Only, he repeated the same words.

Man: "——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword."

He poured his all into his nerves, and finally arrived at where Shaula was lying. Shaula's face was stiff with fear as usual, and Meili had grabbed onto her arm, unable to move.

To take the girls and retreat from this place. Would that even be possible? Subaru's hands, both the one that held the sword, and the other that held Beatrice's hand, were stiff, with no signs of being able to move them. He could not even imagine being able to force up Shaula and Meili by grabbing their arms. In the first place, would that man allow that? What was that man's objective? What was the Examination for, and what purpose did the sword have——

Man: "———Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword."

The words that were being repeated, the phrase, that was the proposal of the Second Floor Electra's Examination.

What meaning could there be in the man repeating those words. The contents of the Examination he had heard about the moment he pulled out the sword, the man who repeated those words, the Fool, and forgiveness, what exactly——

Man: "——Gain, forgiveness… Heavenly Sword… Fool…"

Subaru: "——Huh?"

Quickening his thoughts, the feeling that something terrible was going to happen kept rising in Subaru, and at the same time, the man whose voice kept resonating without stop, came to a swift halt.

Subaru instinctively groaned, a careless act that made Emilia and Beatrice a bit more nervous, but that had no effect on the change taking place.

——More than that, the changes the man underwent were becoming much clearer.

Man: "Heavenly Sword, Fool… his forgiveness… Oh, ohh, ohhh, oh—, oh—"

Subaru: "Wh-what? What, what, what's gonna happen?"

Man: "Ah, ah, ahhhhhhh——!!"

Shaula: "Pigyiii!"

Subaru: "Dowaaa!?"

Stopping was far from it.

Rather, there had been a strange string of sounds at the end of the standing man's words, and in the next moment, the man put a hand on his hair, began scratching, and pelted an explosive shout.

Suddenly unable to stand it, Shaula squealed like a pig and leapt to Subaru. Naturally, he could not keep standing. Her arms coiled around him with all her strength, and unable to take evasive action, Subaru tumbled to the floor with her.

Subaru: "——Hk!"

At the moment of impact, sparks flew in his eyes, while both the man's shout and Shaula's incessant crying, who still clung to his waist, pounded his eardrums.

Man: "Ahhhhhhhhhh——!!"

Shaula: "Hyaaaaa! Mastermastermaster heeeelp!! I don't wannaa! Help meee!"

Subaru: "W-what's with you for the past few minutes——"

Man: "——Shut up already!! My head's already killin' me as it is! Stop shoutin'!"

Shaula: "Ahhh…"

Right before his words of comfort could reach, Shaula's spirit crumbled.

Despite having been thrashing about for some reason, she quietly stuck to Subaru's waist and stopped moving, and losing her consciousness, she collapsed to the floor.

Subaru: "No way, you…"

Shaula: "Bukubukubuku…"

Shaula swiftly and gracefully departed from the battlefront via fainting. Although when it came to conquering the Tower the help to arrive from her, from the Examiner's point of view, would be close to nil, this was supposed to be completely unexpected.

For a woman, whose brute strength deserved a certificate, if nothing else—— To be this afraid of this man, things would certainly be precarious,

Julius: "I take it that you are by no means, a simple existence."

Man: "Aahn?"

The man groaned in displeasure when the high-pitched sound of a single footstep echoed.

With a clack of his pair of white shoes, stepped forward the Finest of Knights—— Julius twirled around and picked up the sword Subaru had dropped.

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by DdukaE (source)

Watching Julius, the man's lips curved down, a scowl plastered his face.

Man: "Fuck's up, ya prick. 'N what's with this place? Ya fuckin' 'round here, ya prick?"

Julius: "No, we are doing nothing of the sort. We too, are of a similarly confused standing. You appeared here all of a sudden—— We cannot help but be on guard, is what I would like to convey."

Man: "Fuck's up, ya prick. Don't be talkin' weird, ya prick. Don't ya be talkin' like my follower, ya prick. Ya my follower? Y'ain't, right? Since y'ain't, don't be talkin' like 'em, makin' all this shit confusin', ya prick."

The man's mood kept turning sour each time Julius spoke with an expected respectful yet careful tone.

Though it was becoming clearer that the man was human, whether conversation with him could be established, was an entirely different topic.

Man: "——Pretty woman, pretty woman, sexy woman, runt, runt, follower, small fry."

Julius: "Unfortunately, I am not your follower."

Man: "Kah! The way ya talk, it's just how my follower talks. Stop copyin' it."

The man belched out a good-humored laugh at Julius' objection.

Unusually white teeth with an oddly handsome face, his shark-like smile, all intermingled reeked of a strange madness.

Man: "————"

Finally, a bit of humanity was found within the smiling man. Or rather, finding out that the man was an intelligent being capable of conversation, would be more appropriate.

Man: "Oi, you. Explain what's happenin' here, ya prick. The hell'd'cha do to me, ya prick. Don't'cha be hidin' stuff, ya prick. Get to it, ya prick."

Subaru: "Appearing out of nowhere, acting like you're hot shit… What's up with that."

Man: "Aahn?"

The man thrust his hand into the open part of his bare chest and scratched carelessly. Subaru, who finally raised his body, squeezed out what words he could muster and spat them at the man.

He simply glared at Subaru with his right eye, who was lying on the floor and,

Man: “Fuck’s up, ya prick. Why’re ya sleepin’, ya prick. Ain’t that a real nice place, ya prick. Getting a woman that sexy to be ya meat bed, ya prick. Switch up with me, ya prick.”

Subaru: “Sadly, with respect to the person herself, I refuse…”

Somewhat stopping his shaking feet, Subaru stood. At the same time, he pried the clinging Shaula off. It was a careless act that made her fall to the floor face-first, but there was no time to consider that. But——,

Man: “Ahh, ahh, aahn? What, ya prick. You doin’ that, ya prick? Fuckin’ ‘round, ya prick?”

Subaru: “…The fuck ya pullin’ that rude shit for, ya prick.”

Man: “Kah!”

The man clenched his molars and roared a hearty, yet violent laughter.

Ignoring Subaru who was clearly confused, the man looked over the white room and nodded to himself, “Ohh, ohh, righty.”, then spoke again,

Man: “Got’cha—— So then, let’s start.”

Subaru: “Start… Wait! Why do you keep on running the conversation all by yourself!? It’s really too much to take!”

Man: “Zip it, ya prick. Keepin’ on yappin’ over and over, already explained it while I was sleep-talkin’, didn’t I? Pay attention to what I’m sayin’, ya prick.”

Subaru: “What’s with this for the past few minutes…”

Emilia: “Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword.”

Unable to keep up with the situation, Subaru's eyes darted around, while Emilia repeatedly whispered the sentence, word-for-word, to herself.

Slowly, the girls started de-petrifying. Following Julius and Subaru, out came Emilia and Beatrice from the stillness of time, and Anastasia and Meili right afterwards.

Only Shaula remained unconscious, however——

Man: "Kah! That hottie over there's different from this here small fry. If I'd been alive, I'd be beddin' ya tonight, ya twat… Lookin' close, ya real sweet, ya. What's with that face. Ya real damn smokin', ya twat."

Emilia: "Smokin'…?"

Subaru: "You! You're the guy! You're the Examiner here, right?"

From looking at Emilia, a lust awakened in his eyes. Putting himself between those two, Subaru stood and pointed at the man.

The man smiled like a shark at the statement and,

Man: "——No clue. Ain't interested in some title someone's put on themselves. I'm me, ya're ya. Nothin' more to it than that. Ya wanna talk with me proper? Get me to move even a step from here, ya prick."

Julius: "————"

They were the words of a man standing defenselessly, calmly.

As for why he had not laughed it off, it was the very condition that needed to be fulfilled to clear the Examination. Thus, it was a task worthy of being called as such.

——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword.

If the man who stood in front were to be this "Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword", then the method to get it was clear. What was left was to see if that method was indeed even possible.

Julius: "Belonging to the Royal Guards of the Kingdom of Lugunica, Julius Juukulius."

Before the fight—— nay, the Examination began, Julius offered his name as an act of courtesy.

It was an act of the greatest honor, declaring the other as their equal, regardless of position or gender.

In response, the man's one blue eye narrowed with excitement, and brought forth an unusual fighting spirit and,

Man: "Ain't got no name worth givin' ya, just a mere Stick Swinger, I am."

The Great Library Pleiades, the Examination of the Second Floor Electra.

Time-limit, no restrictions. Number of attempts, no restrictions. Challengers, no restrictions.

——Examination, start.

Arc 6 Chapter 26 – Stick Swinger

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 4 “Stick Swinger”, Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Hedge, Ringo) — Complete

——A woman, a sole woman existed.

The woman’s spirit had been violated. The woman lay deep in the abyss of insanity. The woman was standing upon the farthest land of starvation.

Growling in the solitary castle, gnawing the unoccupied throne, breaking her teeth, ripping up her mouth, starving.

The woman had been a human when she was born, but at that point in time, she no longer remained human.

It all had begun a few years ago, when the man governing those lands fell victim to an incurable illness.

Weakening by the day, the man, frightened of his approaching death, stretched his hands to all kinds of means in order to prolong his life.

Before long he attained techniques which were taboo, and gathered a large number of lives for an outrageous immorality for the purpose of attaining a long life.

Abundantly, lives were sacrificed, abundantly, lives were rendered idle, and among those sacrifices was the woman.

Who she was, what her name was, what her birthplace was, who her family was, such memories of hers had already been burnt away.

Merely a tool, was the woman. A seedbed, for the man merely awaiting his death, having been eaten away by the demon of ill health.

Idle life only to be wasted, that was how it was supposed to be, yet the woman survived.

A body ruined, power gushing forth, the lamp of a life ostracized by what was called time.

The hopes, the dearest wishes of the man trespassed by the demon of ill health, materialized upon the woman's body.

The man was delighted at the fruits of his labor, postponing the memorial for those sacrificed, then overbearingly unfastened the woman's constraints.

——When she came to notice, the woman was alone, in the uninhabited solitary castle, anguishing and suffering with starvation.

Thoughts disappearing with cruel hunger, memories devoured into a void by violent thirst.

She had nothing in her memories. She had nothing within her understanding. Merely, her entire body had constraints, so she possessed no freedom either.

Eating away all food within the castle, vomiting out the content of her stomach, chewing and digesting them once again, she continued to repeat.

Ultimately for what remained of her starvation, she bit into the stone walls, crunched the throne, ate the carpets.

At that pace, she would starve to death. Her body, which was unable to perish, would starve to death.

Woman: "Grrgrr, grrrr. Grrgrr, grrrr…"

At the extremity of starvation unable to obtain trance, the woman finally saw an illusion.

Inside the solitary castle, bustling about with willful freedom was a horde of dogs clad in bestial hair.

Even if it was a hallucination, she did not mind. If she was unable to be satiated physically, she desired to satisfy merely her heart.

With such wholeheartedness the woman crawled, devouring the beasts. Devoured the beasts. Ate them away.

She was being satisfied. The following instant, she vomited. She licked what had been vomited. She chewed. Vomited, ate.

In the illusion, in the mirage, in the hallucination, in her desire, there present was taste. There present was form. She could feel it on her tongue.

When she came to notice, the interior of the castle had become a den of repulsive beasts.

Woman: “Aha, ahaha, ahahahahahaha~.”

She was greatly delighted. Buried in days of eating and getting eaten, she was satisfied after she ate, and she vomited after she was satisfied.

Stuck between starvation and refusing food, the woman ate and vomited, slurped and spilled.

Given birth to by the empty skies—— no, given rebirth to, were the beasts with a repulsive presence.

Before she noticed, the woman’s constraints were exposed to the battle for devouring between the beasts and her, came loose, and she was freed.

Attaining freedom, the woman crawled, exited the castle.

The beasts as well, following the woman, exited the castle. Upon the earth, in all directions, they scattered around.

Hunger, starvation, unable to endure them, the woman devoured, and kept the castle she had grown tired of eating for later.

To visit it, when the day of the satisfaction of her hunger and thirst would arrive.

——The Witch of Gluttony gave birth to the horde of Witchbeasts, and continued to starve from inexhaustible starvation.

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——On the Second Floor Electra of the Pleiades Watchtower, in a room white as chalk, the Examination began.

The Examiner stood in the corner of the room, a man with red hair and the smile of a shark plastered on his face.

Introducing himself as naught but a Stick Swinger, the man's aura overflowed with an unusual sword spirit.

The way he appeared was in itself complicated. Even Shaula herself, who was the supposed caretaker of the Watchtower, had fainted the moment she laid eyes on him. As such, he was obviously no one ordinary. Thus——

Julius: "I shall, from the first moment, fight at full power——!"

Stick Swinger: "————"

Leaning forward, Julius spoke as he took a step forward.

The blade he softly threw towards the man, was the same Sword of Selection that had been stuck into the floor of Electra. The sword spun in the air, flying in an arc, before it stabbed the ground near the man's feet.

So that the man may simply stretch out his hand to take it.

Stick Swinger: "Fuck're ya doin', ya prick. Throwin' me a sword 'n all, ya got a death wish?"

Julius: "Unfortunately, as a Knight, it is most shameful an act to swing a sword at one unarmed!"

Stick Swinger: "Kah! Makin' me laugh—— Ain't empty-handed, take a closer look, ya prick."

The man roared with laughter, teeth bared, at the advancing Julius. And while laughing, he casually raised his foot in the air and gave a wild kick to the sword. The Sword of Selection gave a shrill wail as it flew off.

It screeched inches past Julius, who had lunged towards the man——

Julius: "——Tch! I hope you bear no regret for speaking those words!"

His thoughtfulness coldly cast aside, Julius's face cheeks stiffened as he swung out his Knight's sword.

The slender blade he raised in a straight line, as a hammer to strike at those insolent enough to disgrace the grounds of a duel.

It pierced forward, swift as lightning but——

Stick Swinger: "Don't be shoutin' all cutesy there, buffoon. Ya got a damn nice face. Wouldn't'cha be troubled if ya get off on ol' me cryin'?"

Julius: "Wha… Tch."

With a thunderous boom, the tip stopped before reaching the man's torso.

Of course, Julius had not slackened his hand. He always tried to the best of his abilities, regardless of the situation. Thus, it was not him that stopped the blade, but rather the man bearing the smile of a shark.

Julius: "Impossible!"

Stick Swinger: "Gotta believe what'cha see. It all starts from there, ya know."

Cackling with joyous laughter, the Stick Swinger raised his right hand and scratched his chest. It was the same behavior as before. Just like the time he was piling up on a nonsense conversation.

However, his left hand pinched the tip of Julius's sword, with frightening accuracy. That too, with——

Julius: "——A pair, of twigs?"

Stick Swinger: "Look 'ere, it's not even close. What, yer eyes bad or somethin', ya prick. Chopsticks, they're chopsticks. Pretty nice for grabbin' snacks, them chopsticks. 'Tis why I keep 'em on me."

So slender, one had to squint to properly see the pair of wooden sticks—— the Stick Swinger held them in his left hand and used them with grace and dexterity, similar to how Subaru knew them to be used,

who had reflexively groaned upon seeing them. Chopsticks indeed existed in this world, as he had witnessed and experienced during his stay at Pristella, but to witness one use them with such finesse, was a first.

——No, regardless of the finesse one possessed in their use, to stop the swing of a first-class swordsman using a pair of chopsticks was absolutely an inhuman feat.

Stick Swinger: “Hah? Don’t be makin’ me laugh, ya prick. Swingin’ at the best angle, with the best speed, with the best feelin’, in the best way—— Be chopsticks or whatever, there’s nothin’ it can’t cut.”

Julius: “Guh… Tch.”

Rolling his eyes over the awestruck faces, the Stick Swinger yawned, then spoke with a stab of sarcasm. But while it was normal for everyone to be silent when shown such a spectacle, Julius, the concerned party, could not.

He put strength into his arm and pulled to pry away the Knight’s sword that remained stuck between the pair of chopsticks. However, no matter how much strength he put in, the sword would not budge.

Stick Swinger: “Lemme tell ya tho’, these chopsticks here ain’t made outta somethin’ funny. Bad material’s just bad for the skin, so. Got nothin’ mixed in, just your everyday pair, made from some tree somewhere.”

Julius: “Kh…”

Stick Swinger: “Let it out, let it out… Best be laughin’, ya prick. Whoever’s laughin’s more of a looker. Not that it matters, you bein’ a guy.”

Suddenly, the block he felt at the tip of his sword was gone, leaving Julius bewildered. In that instant, the man turned his body and leapt into the air with his two bare feet. With tremendous force, he landed a kick right above Julius’s slender waist, sending him flying.

???: “Julius——!”

Subaru did not know who raised their voice in a scream, but they had no choice but to watch his flight, as everyone had to put in much more thought before making any kind of sudden movement.

And now, following him as he soared across the air, unable to fix his posture,

Stick Swinger: “Kah!”

The Stick Swinger’s figure shot off like a bullet, chasing right after Julius. With unbelievable physical prowess, he stopped right above Julius and, taking a stance with a chopstick in each hand, released a flurry of slashes aimed at Julius—— Whether they could be called slashes was up for debate, but regardless, the man unleashed a violent flurry of strikes with the chopsticks.

With movements so fast, each separate strike seemed to disappear. It appeared the same way to everyone, and Julius was already helpless midair, so he had no way of dodging.

With his Knight’s sword as his only ally, Julius met each chopstick slash with his own. However, the chopsticks slipped past, as if sneering, and stabbed into Julius, again, and again, and again, and again, and again——,

???: “Jiwald——!!”

A ray of heat shot across the air, aimed towards the engaged duo.

White light, in its most simple form, that could rip through the world with its dreadful edge. In other words, it could become an invisible blade that tore, cut and burnt through everything in its path.

It went straight, and was as such, easy to dodge—— However, the shimmering rays travelled at the speed of light, crashing straight into its target.

Even so, the Stick Swinger cut away the rays of light fired by the third party with ease——

Stick Swinger: “——My sword can cut even light, ya twat.”

Faster than his own gruff voice’s echo, the chopsticks struck and sliced through the ray of light.

An impossible spectacle that pulled in the attention of everyone present. Only the man sneered, as if he had done something ordinary, and continued jabbing at Julius with his free hand.

As if making light of him—— No, the truth was, he indeed was making very light of him.

???: “——Tch! Jiwaaaaaald——!!”

In response to that, his eyes turned red, overlapping with the chant——

With both arms spread wide, chanting for the magic that shot rays of heat, her graceful composure painted with panic, was Anastasia. Hands open, all fingers poised—— Ten fingers in total shot out ten rays of death simultaneously, all danced in the air as they approached the Stick Swinger.

——And the Stick Swinger himself took just as an amazing measure.

Stick Swinger: “Kah!”

The Stick Swinger faced the dancing beams head on and sliced through them with his chopsticks, just like before, then he pounced up by kicking off of thin air and made a nosedive—— Taking Julius, who was right below, along with him, dragging him across the white floor as he ran, Julius was pinned by the chopsticks in his solar plexus.

Stick Swinger: “Kakakakakah! Aim well, ya twat. Can’t even swat a fly like that, ya twat. They don’t call me a lady-killer for nothin’, ya twat. Kakakakah!”

Anastasia: “Jiwald! Jiwald! Jiwaaald——!”

Anastasia still chose to continue her attacks against the cackling man. Unfortunately, regardless of its firepower, if the magic did not hit, there was no meaning to it.

Even with her firing them all over, the man simply cut through, at times ducked, and at times made a sharp spin by putting his weight on Julius.

His overwhelming physical and battle prowess in full display, clashed against Anastasia’s clearly poor aim.

In this case, technically it was not Anastasia whose aim was poor, but Echidna’s, who was currently inhabiting that body. Despite wishing to aid Julius with a surprise magic attack, her actions severely failed her intentions, leaving her unable to even get a scratch in. Soon——,

Anastasia: “——Ah, kuh.”

Stick Swinger: “Aahn?”

Her time, it would seem, would run out first.

The Stick Swinger who was gleefully dodging the heat rays, stopped and raised his eyebrows when the rays halted their pursuit. At the end of his gaze was Anastasia, whose delicate body had collapsed to the ground.

Blood flowed from her nostrils, a sign that she had overworked her own body. She had stated it herself earlier. She could not rely on her trump card, as it would shave away her own life——

Julius: “Anastasia-sama——!”

Stick Swinger: “Ohh!?”

The Knight’s vigor instilled by the sight of his falling master, Julius broke free of his defense-only stance, free from being slid around on his back, free from the relentless blows of the chopsticks of the Stick Swinger.

He had taken off the button near his chest and flung away his Royal Guard’s mantle, forcing the direction of friction to change, allowing him to get out of the cycle.

From his position on the floor, he aimed a circular kick at the man’s head, cursing his own foolishness. The man moved his chin away slightly, escaping the blow, but Julius repeated his kicks two more times like a breakdance. After a few rounds of kicks and dodging, he stood back up.

Stick Swinger: “Ya really pulled a good one, ya prick. Felt that good, ya prick.”

Julius: “I do not have time for your nonsense! Move it——!”

Their absolute difference in ability, was something Julius understood too well, yet still roared at him. His Knight’s sword, even after the countless blows he had taken, had not left his hand.

So the sword flew, slithering through the air in a show of swordsmanship of the utmost grace and elegance, even while being worn down with righteous cause and a sense of duty—— It may have been the finest display of a Knight’s swordsmanship.

A countless number of days, of months must have been spent, shed tears and blood training to refine his technique. And yet——

Stick Swinger: “Playin’ with me, ya prick? Ya playin’ me, ya prick? Don’t be goin’ light on me, ya prick.”

Julius: “——Kh.”

Stick Swinger: “What’s this. Don’t make me laugh, ya prick. Don’t be holdin’ back, gimme all ya got, ya prick. Are ya serious ‘bout this… If this all ya got, man, what a let-down, ya prick.”

His thrusts were stopped, slashes, blown away, barrages, shot down and his one-shots, parried.

The technique Julius had built up, his own essence as a Knight, were all denied by the swaying pair of frighteningly beautiful, violent and powerful chopsticks, wielded by a man who kept yawning, who named himself only as a mere Stick Swinger.

Half his life, was being trampled over by a pair of measly twigs——

Stick Swinger: “Y’ain’t like this usually, ya prick. Why’s ya fightin’ all lonesome, that ain’t how ya fight, is it prick? Y’ain’t used to it—— That’s why all this’s borin’ me, ya prick.”

Julius: “I am…”

Stick Swinger: “If ya wanna tend to ya girl, I’ll let’cha. Borrow a pair of ’em thicc thighs and get babied, ya ugly failure of a swordsman.”

That which flashed across Julius’s face, was it wrath? Pain? Regret? Despair?

In any case, one can never truly know what lies within others.

Julius: “————”

Julius’s sword flashed, his thin Knight’s sword, as it did likely millions of times before, tracing across the air.

Anyone watching, even from the sidelines with untrained eyes, could tell it was a swing full of faults.

The chopsticks dove into the flash from the side.

In the next moment, sailing through the air, the wood tore through the steel of the Knight's sword—— With a faint cry, Julius's Knight's sword snapped in two.

His yellow eyes could only widen and follow the sight of his beloved sword's tip as it spun across the air. How long had he been using that sword? What history did he share with it? None knew.

Only, what broke had not been limited to his sword.

Stick Swinger: "Off with'cha."

Accompanying the spat-out words were giant fists thrown at his face.

It was the most unrefined and primitive kind of violence. A violence that was prevalent from a time long before man had any kind of tools, that utilized one's own flesh.

Stick Swinger: "————"

The merciless strike broke Julius's elegant profile. The blow took his consciousness and sent his body flying across the room, where it followed the laws of inertia and crashed, rolled, then finally remained still, body splayed across like a broken doll—— Right beside Anastasia.

Like master, like servant, the unconscious duo had been lined up. It was the beastly man's misplaced sense of consideration.

Stick Swinger: "Well, well, next up's…"

Snapping his neck like he just finished warming up, the man turned to them.

In truth, it was a warm-up to him. In only a few tens of seconds, Julius had dashed across the battlefield, got beaten in a one-sided fight, Anastasia tried to help but the two ended up only collapsing together—— Within that time, Subaru had not a single chance to cut in, and could only stand and watch.

And just like him, there stood still——

???: "——Ice Brand Arts, Icicle Line."

Stick Swinger: "————"

——Absolutely none.

As if to prove it, white particles danced around her.

Pale blue specks of light, barely noticeable in that they were actually fragments of ice—— Birthed by Emilia's absolute magic, a boundary of ice and snow, Icicle Line[91].

Emilia: "I want to ask one thing before we start."

Mixing her own magic energy with the Mana of her surroundings, she put up a kind of barrier with the man in its center as he scratched the place above his eyepatch, then called out to him.

Stick Swinger: "Aanh? Lemme hear, smokin' hottie."

Emilia: "I'm Emilia. Just Emilia—— Wasn't the condition, to make you take just one step? You ran around a lot just now though."

After giving her name, she asked a natural question.

Before the fight started, the Stick Swinger had indeed stated that while laughing, "Let's see ya get me to move even one step". If that were to be taken as the condition, then it had obviously been broken.

To say they had been flying across and all over the room during Julius's fight, would be grossly understating everything.

However, the man shrugged and spoke, "Oi, oi."

Stick Swinger: "Don't be takin' that stuff seriously, ya twat. Just made it up on the spot. It happens, right? Ya wanna be lookin' cool from time to time, right? It's like that, ya twat. Geddit? Ya don't? Well, ya bein' a woman 'n all. Bein' a smokin' hottie 'n all. Be with me tonight, ya twat."

Emilia: "Sorry, I've got no idea what you're talking about. Besides, I don't think I can win, even if I fight you."

[91] I would usually Engrish flip "Icicle Line", as it's written in Engrish (アイシクルライン), but it's plenty used in the community and there's really no point other than fancy. It'd probably be "*Tsurara Retsu*" (氷柱列) otherwise, which is quite punny since a Kanji meaning violence (烈) is also read "*Retsu*".

Subaru: “Eh, Emilia…?”

With magic ready at hand, her posture saying she was completely ready to fight, Emilia boldly proclaimed her powerlessness. The Stick Swinger’s eyes widened at that remark, and Subaru, who was standing stiff, blurted out something.

Emilia responded to him with a small, “Really sorry”, then turned back to the man,

Emilia: “You’re reaaally strong. I can see that. But we have to pass this Examination. So please, give us a way to win.”

Stick Swinger: “…”

Emilia: “If we manage to make you move even one step, it’s our win. Let’s base our match on that… Can’t we?”

She lowered her brows, then asked the silent man. At the end, she added something with a little bit more confidence, which stunned Subaru.

It was an absolutely ridiculous proposition, one only the greatest of idiots would accept.

The Stick Swinger had remained silent for a good moment after hearing that flimsy proposal, but then——

Stick Swinger: “Kah!”

He bared his teeth in laughter, then looked at Emilia through his bright, blue eyes. Those eyes washed over her frame, as if licking her from head-to-toe, and then,

Stick Swinger: “——Real fine stuff ya made of, can’t say I hate it, ya twat. Showed lotsa guts, sayin’ all that to someone like me. Biggest idiot I’ve seen since Trisha, ya twat. I’ve taken a liking to ya.”

Emilia: “So, I’ve passed the Examination?”

Stick Swinger: “I ain’t gonna treat ya that much, ya twat! But aight. Already showed off in front of a nice lady. Gotta keep it up. Gonna turn even in my grave if I step down here—— I’ll make it as ya want.”

Emilia: “I’ll pass if…”

Stick Swinger: “Ya win if ya can make me move even a single step!”

The Stick Swinger with a softened expression, called out to the crestfallen Emilia, who immediately looked up and nodded, then turned to Subaru,

Emilia: “I’m leaving Anastasia and Julius to you. Please tend to them.”

Subaru: “T-time! You saw what happened just now, right!? Going in without a plan’s…”

Emilia: “It’s okay. He doesn’t seem like he’s aiming to kill… And I’ll give my everything, too.”

Brimming with confidence, Emilia cut off Subaru’s attempt to stop her and took a step forward. And then, while still wearing her dignified look, raised both her hands towards the Stick Swinger.

With that much distance put between them, she could one-sidedly snipe him with her magic.

Stick Swinger: “With a face that hot, ya pretty stubborn, ya twat.”

Emilia: “Do what you can the best you can, is what I’ve learned from my great Knight!”

Even in such a disadvantageous situation, the man simply folded his giant arms and laughed fiercely.

With her sights set on the man’s smile, Emilia put some force into her words—— Right away the air popped and snapped and droplets of pale light fluttered about, then formed into weapons of ice one after another.

Swords, lances, spears, axes, arrows, and many, many more weapons formed.

Ice Brand Arts: Icicle Line—— A technique that used the giant reserves of magical energy inside Emilia to create a limited-area boundary of destruction, a special technique forged through Subaru’s otherworldly inventiveness, had activated.

Emilia: “Ei, ya!!”

She raised her voice in a war cry, but it had no effect on the man.

Accompanying her cry, the weapons that had their tips pointed towards the Stick Swinger shot off from all directions at the same time[92].

Multiple weapons that struck even from one's blind spots, it was indeed an unblockable attack.

Faced with this, the man once again took one chopstick in each hand, and released a raging flurry of strikes, starting the tyranny of chopsticks.

Art unfolded in the spectacle of a single man ripping through ice.

Subaru: "————"

Following Emilia's instructions, Subaru dashed to where lay Julius and Anastasia, checked their condition and sighed in relief upon the realization that they were merely unconscious.

Anastasia's case was, as Echidna had worried, likely to be the result of her forcibly using magic by shaving off her life force. While not completely in the clear, her nosebleed had stopped, and she seemed to have simply fainted. As for Julius, even though he had been assaulted by chopstick-fu, which had likely hurt, he retained no more than a few bruises to his body.

If he were to, say, have been struck one hundred times, if it were a sword and not chopsticks, he would have died a hundred times over, but he was likely shown consideration, so the end result was by no means a minus.

Beatrice: "Both of them are doing well, I suppose. But…"

Subaru: "I know."

Beatrice, who had come beside Subaru to check on their wellbeing as well, was cut off.

They were done checking the duo's condition. As for the beast that did this in the first place, Emilia was busy clashing with it head-on——

Stick Swinger: "Kah!"

---

[92] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Gotta applaud Subaru for giving Emilia the Gate of Babylon of all things". A Fate (or is it Type-MOON?) reference.

Ice sprayed and shattered, and the overjoyed man crushed their fragments under his teeth while swinging his chopsticks. With just that one swing, a hatchet and sword of ice that had come bearing down on him at the same time, were cleaved right in twain.

The shattered weapons of ice turned into bubbles of pale light, which fell and scattered around the raging wild man, a fantastical spectacle that repeated itself endlessly.

However, even while doing so——

Subaru: "——He won't budge."

Stick Swinger: "Started with flashin' my cool side, so lemme keep bein' my coolest 'til the very end, how boring can ya get, ya prick."

Upon hearing Subaru's groan, the Stick Swinger began humming some kind of tune while intercepting the many ice weapons. Even then, while his upper body swung like he was doing some kind of tempestuous dance, his feet remained cemented in the ground, like a pair of immovable mountains.

Against someone like that, even firing off magic like a hailstorm was doing little. That sense of frustration not only festered in Subaru, who had a bird's eye view of the fight, but also in Emilia, who was directly involved in it.

So, to break this stalemate, Emilia stepped in——

Emilia: "——Uuuu~, ya!!"

Silver hair fluttering in the air behind her slender body, Emilia pounced into battle. Raising both her arms, she grasped the hilt of a great battle-axe.

She turned herself full circle and brought it down straight towards the man's head.

Stick Swinger: "Kakah!"

The man casually thrust up his chopsticks to intercept its trajectory. The chopstick only slightly changed the falling battle-axe's trajectory, but the discrepancy grew in size as it fell, the edge finally managing to gaze past his *kinagashi*'s sleeve, and pierced into the ground.

The violent blow raised a blast of wind, and unable to withstand the shock of its own power, the battle-axe of ice shattered into millions of fragments. However, she let go of the handle and immediately took in hand a lance that was being launched from behind her, then turned her body a full-circle to land her next attack.

Emilia: “Ei! Ya! Torya! Urya! Uryaurya! Uyah!”

The thrust of a lance, the flash of twin swords, the swing of a longsword, the slash of a katana, the smash of a hatchet, all and any forms of attacking, were all meaningless when pit against this man.

Of course, Emilia was not lacking in any skill.

Her physical strength was in no way lacking and the Ice Brand Arts was, as Subaru would usually say even though he had been the one to come up with it, the one and only one technique that brought out the best of her abilities, utilizing both her physical prowess and enormous magical reserve to the greatest effect.

Beatrice: “——Subaru.”

Beatrice gripped his hand tightly. This grip filled Subaru with much needed composure, but he continued to desperately strain his eyes at the battlefield.

He could not find a single chance to break into the fight. Emilia was fighting up to that extent, where she kept swapping between weapons she was good with, always playing to her strengths, continuing her physical attacks, as well as firing off her storm of magic. The center was indeed, a point which was being consistently carpet-bombed.

And the man who stood at the dead center of that, dealing with everything without taking even a step, the monster who had named himself as nothing more than a mere Stick Swinger, was a complete abnormality.

If he carelessly dove in, Subaru may only prove to be a distraction to Emilia. He could not deny that.

He could do nothing to remove his anxiety. Beatrice, who held his hand, too stood in silence, fully understanding that she was the same, in being able to do nothing but watch over the battle with clenched teeth.

Could the situation improve before Emilia's stamina ran out?

Just then, an unexpected change occurred in this situation. That too, suddenly.

Emilia: "Huff! Ei! Terya!"

Both her hands grasped a pair of swords and swung them from both sides, aimed at his neck to decapitate. The man quickly lowered his head to avoid the blow, while both swords slipped out of Emilia's hand and flew away. But, Emilia immediately created another pair in her palms and swung her crossed arms outwards—— The man dodged in a much fancier style, leaning so much that his body went parallel to the floor.

Stick Swinger: "Kah!"

Emilia: "Wah."

Knees bent, body almost touching the floor, the man held this position with the inhuman strength of his ankles. On the other hand, Emilia lost to her own momentum, letting her arms fly through nothing, leaving herself wide open and with a step in front, leaning back.

This was the first big, even life-threatening, mistake Emilia had made in this fight—— The man might have seen even more, but this moment must have been the biggest chance he had seen.

Right then, the man straightened his bent knees, popping back into position. Emilia was left off-guard, and bit her molars.

In that moment, the man bared his teeth the most he had, then leaned forward with his shark-like smile.

Stick Swinger: "Ya're wide open."

Using the chopsticks at hand, he brushed over Emilia's twin peaks in a scooping motion.

Emilia: "Wh——"

Emilia was dressed in her usual white outfit, where parts of her white and smooth skin were visible. The chopsticks streaked over her chest, making her abundant swelling bob about obscenely, which made the man's vile smile deepen.

The man groaned in satisfaction at the results of his obscene act.

Stick Swinger: “Good, real good stuff. But don’t be gettin’ mad over somethin’ so small…”

Emilia: “Torya!”

Stick Swinger: “Goah——!?”

Her hands crossed together above-head, encased in gloves fashioned from ice, came down on the man’s head, who was busy ogling her with a vile smile.

The power of the blow was such that the ice shattered, the sound of its hard impact resonating. The man yelled in pain, then dropped to the floor with his head held, and began rolling around.

Stick Swinger: “Guooooooooh! It hurts daaamnit! Wh-what the hell were ya thinkin’, ya twat!? Usually, a woman’s gonna hesitate if someone does that, but ya didn’t even blink! Fuck’s with’cha!?”

Emilia: “——? But, you just touched my body, right? Plus, you were completely off-guard.”

Stick Swinger: “Don’t fuck around! The fuck’s with yer upbringing! The fuck were ya parents doin’!”

Rubbing his beaten head, the Stick Swinger sat on the ground with his legs crossed, shouting out his complaints. Emilia blinked in surprise at his shout, then touched the part of her chest where the chopsticks had brushed passed,

Emilia: “…Did I, say something strange?”

Stick Swinger: “Oi! Do somethin’ ‘bout this smokin’ hottie! Get her walkin’ out or somethin’! Small fry! Ya supposed to be attendin’ to her! Make somethin’ of yerself, do it proper! It hurts, goddamnit…!”

Subaru: “I-I’m in no place to be taking this from you. That aside…”

Stick Swinger: “Aaahn!?”

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by Norvak (source)

Despite being overwhelmed, Subaru somewhat managed to talk back to the raging man. Once he managed to swallow his own anger at how the man stretched out an obscene hand towards Emilia, he pointed to him, and spoke.

Subaru: “To hell with just one step, you moved a whole lot away.”

Stick Swinger: “————”

Emilia: “Ah! It’s true! I did it! I won!”

His mouth shut when Subaru pointed it out, and in exchange, Emilia started jumping up and down.

And in accordance to her feelings, flowers of ice began blooming in her immediate surroundings, as if to celebrate her own victory.

The man had declared it himself, that the condition was to make him move even a step from where he stood, which had been achieved.

That fact was as clear as day to everyone, and unless the man made things harder, it would be accepted.

Subaru: “Well, how about it?”

He felt bad for Emilia, who was celebrating her own victory over the Examination, but Subaru did not fully trust the man. From all the exchanges they had, to expect sportsmanship from him was difficult.

To invalidate his loss, declare the last Examination as void, and rush them with everything he had, would not be too unlikely.

A single drop of sweat rolled down Subaru’s brows and across his cheeks.

Stick Swinger: “Ahh, no helpin’ it. My word’s my word. This kinda defeat’d make me a laughin’ stock, lecher soul be damned, but I ain’t got a choice.”

Subaru: “Y-you’ll approve …!?”

Stick Swinger: “Ya prick, the fuck ya thinkin’ of me. If I ain’t keepin’ my word ‘ere, all my posin’ cool’s gonna get shot, ya prick. Gonna flip everythin’ I worked on over, ya prick. Ain’t gonna be able to take a step towards women no more, ya prick.”

Subaru: “Yeah no, with the way you lost right now, your worth was already at rock-bottom…”

Stick Swinger: “Shut it, small fry! Heck, y’ain’t even a proper fish, ya just a tadpole. Don’t be throwin’ round weight, tadpole. Anyway, that smokin’ hottie over there wins. Ya get a pass. That’s the condition. No helpin’ it.”

Scratching his head violently, the Stick Swinger admitted his defeat.

While it had spiraled into a situation where it was hard to tell whether those actions were sportsmanlike or unbecoming, Subaru had no intention of prying further into those matters, not when the announcement had already been made.

Although both Julius and Anastasia lay fallen as victims of battle against the man, they would likely bounce right back up if left to recover in the Green Room.

Despite being the Second Examination, it seemed to be too small an obstacle but——

Stick Swinger: “——Well, who’s gonna be next? The tadpole? Or is it gonna be one of ‘em brats.”

Subaru: “Eh?”

They could advance upward.

Subaru, who had been caught by that thought, became guarded once more at the man’s words. The man slowly stood back up at that response, left shoulder covered by cloth—— He bared it as well to match his right shoulder and turned to them.

——The air flooded with a burnt stench.

It surged from the man’s unimaginable sword spirit—— a dramatic change that made everything from before seem like child’s play, Subaru noticed too late.

Stick Swinger: “There’s ‘round, seven people in this Tower… Yer girl’s the only one to get past.”

Subaru: “————”

Stick Swinger: “Well, who’s up to get past me next? ——Tell me, ya prick.”

The Great Library Pleiades, the Examination of the Second Floor Electra.

Time-limit, no restrictions. Number of attempts, no restrictions. Challengers, no restrictions.

——Has cleared, Emilia.

——Yet to clear, Subaru, Beatrice, Julius, Anastasia, Meili, Ram.

——Examination, continues.

Arc 6 Chapter 27 – Electra's Wall

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 4 "Stick Swinger", Parts 4-7

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, Ringo) — Complete

——A woman, a sole woman existed.

The woman was a commonplace village girl, one with an ordinary birth and growth. Loved by her parents, loved by her siblings, the woman too loved her family, she was an extremely normal woman.

With a fiancé decided by her household, she would end her established lifetime in a corner of a poor village, identical to many other village girls. For the woman, that meant life, the paved order of things having no room for doubt.

Such ordinarity of the woman was crushed at the hands of sleazy powerful men who appeared in the village. What made her fit, or was it merely the vice of humans, unknowing of the eventual truth, the woman was coercively desired by the powerful men.

No matter it being a poor village of a small country, there existed a disparity impossible to eliminate with the powerful men. The woman was unable to oppose the demand of the powerful men. She had no choice but to yield to the irrationality of fate.

However, the woman was loved. By her family, by her fiancé, by the people of her village.

Braving the oppression of the powerful men, the people's rage flared up, giving birth to flames of war before long.

The fire spread, the residents of the village organized into an army, and at last, the powerful men along with the small castle were scorched to the ground.

In naught but a single evening, the woman's position changed vastly.

A mere ordinary village girl, her fiancé the ringleader of a single group of troops.

The raging of the unremitting blaze, the surrounding ones who regarded that as hazardous turned to their own troops from one to the next.

That proved as being beaten at their own game for those who roused themselves claiming it was all for the sake of the woman.

The fire spread whilst the flames of war coruscated, burning the small country, neighboring countries, and a great country to nothing before long.

The existence of the woman, who was made to be the origin of it all, was renowned, the people rumored her to be a beautiful maiden of the heavens.

Illusions piled over illusions, and due to the interest and expectations, the woman's petite body was about to shatter.

Nobody took notice of that. Neither her family, nor her fiancé, nor the people, no one was looking at the woman.

Cheers when she moved a hand, stampedes when she walked a street, tears of joy when she spoke a word, were all turned towards the woman.

Woman: "This, is… strange. Y-you're, wro… ng…"

Shrouding her face, she denied. That this was bit possible, that this was not supposed to be.

Her self was a mere village girl, neither a beauty of the heavens nor a charming siren, but a single meager village girl.

Where in her lay such worth.

The people were intoxicated with dreams. Misled by illusions, dancing with ideals.

Before long, without adhering to any curtailments, even a great country was burnt to ash with the woman at its origin.

The ruined great country, the robbed castle, at its summit the fiancé knelt before the woman. And, informed her.

???: "——I love you. This triumph, the smiles of the people, are all things given by you."

The flaring Royal Capital, heaps of corpses, the people trembling moved with ecstasy. The villagers she lived with too, the family who loved her too, the fiancé who wished for well-being too.

No longer was anyone anywhere.

——Without responding to the fiancé, the woman left. Abandoning her family, the villagers, anything and everything.

She was not supposed to have been bestowed with it. Never had she wished for it. The woman merely lost everything.

Having lost the days she was loved which certainly existed, the woman, alone, proceeded to the burnt fields.

Yet, the dreams, the illusions, the ideals did not let the woman escape.

Wherever she proceeded to, anyone and everyone loved the woman, devoted themselves to the woman, desired the woman, everything was brought to ruin.

Anyone and everyone loved the woman. Like a curse. Whilst unaware of true love inside.

The Witch of Lust sought the love she lost, and continued to be loved by the love summoning ruin.

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——The swordsmanship brimming out of him pierced without restraint towards Subaru and the others who had challenged Electra.

The man was garbed in a crimson robe with both of his arms outside of his sleeves, and his upper torso lay bare other than the *sarashi*[93] wrapped around it.

There was a glint of madness in the Stick Swinger's eyes after he'd given them that dire proclamation.

The Examination of the Second Floor—— Which in short was making their Examiner, the Stick Swinger, recognize their qualifications to proceed to the upper floor. That had already ended up with two people dropping out due to the atypical skill of the man.

Even under these conditions Emilia had somehow managed to snatch away victory thanks to her fighting strength along with her characteristic pluckiness, tenacity and use of numerous weapons. However——

Subaru: "——Didn't the conditions say that it's fine if just one person clears it!?"

Stick Swinger: "Aaahn? Who the fuck said that, stop pullin' stuff out of yer ass, ya prick. Why would it be that if one person can go up, then all the rest of ya can. Use yer common sense, use it! Is the inside of yer head also like that of a small fry, ya prick."

Subaru: "Y-you're making this point to the guy who doesn't wanna be told the most in the world about common sense…!"

Subaru groaned at the perfectly reasonable point which the man had made, who had now crossed his chopsticks over, one held in each hand, with a clack.

In actual fact, the one who had jumped to conclusions about the clear conditions of the Examination had been Subaru himself.

The Examination on the Third Floor had involved solving a puzzle and, once solved, the structure of the room itself had changed; so it was possible to say that he had jumped to that conclusion. He had incorrectly assumed that a new Library would materialize if one of them cleared the Examination of the Second Floor.

If his assumption had collapsed and clearing the Examination did require each of their strengths in battle, then it was pretty safe to say that beating this Examination would be futile.

[93] A long, white cloth that may be wrapped around the body under a kimono.

The condition which Emilia had managed to achieve—— Namely, "To move the man even one step", they had seen now just how hard achieving that was in stark contrast to its seeming simplicity.

Speaking clearly about it, Emilia was currently the strongest amongst everyone who had come to challenge Pleiades Watchtower along with Julius—— Though as long as Julius's Contract with his Quasi Spirits was gone he could objectively say that she was the strongest amongst them.

The man had been extremely negligent in their first bout, and that had ended up allowing Emilia to defeat him.

In summary, they had pitted their strongest vanguard against their enemy when he was at his weakest.

They had managed to beat him once, but now that it had become a tournament where everyone had to beat him, they would have to pit everyone else, their fighting prowess not as good, against this man who had no more chinks in his armor.

Move the man one step—— Were they really going to be able to achieve a victory like the one Emilia had snatched away born out of a combination of good fortune and an attack of that caliber?

Beatrice: "——Wait up, in fact. There's a key mistake in what you're saying, I suppose."

Stick Swinger: "A mistake?"

Shuddering at the prospect, Subaru tried to look for a glimmer of victory amidst their terrible predicament. Beatrice, who was right beside him, firmly squeezed his hand so to calm him down and spoke out to the man.

The man grew sullen as he heard her words and pointed his uncovered eye towards Beatrice,

Stick Swinger: "What're ya sayin', ya twat. Ya've come ten years too early, ya twat. No, at least five, ya twat. Ya can come here after yer legs, arms 'n body grow 'n after ya get some tits 'n ass, ya twat."

Beatrice: "…I never had any intentions of playing along with your crap, but right now you've made me part with those intentions completely, in fact. That's why I'm going to knock this into that thick skull of yours, I suppose."

Stick Swinger: "My thick skull… The fuck you mean?"

Beatrice: "It's already been decided, in fact—— Emilia told you if you were moved even one step then it'd be our victory, I suppose. In other words, Emilia's victory was a victory for all of us, in fact!"

Subaru: "——Hk!"

Subaru held his breath and instinctively looked over at Emilia.

He had never expected that she would have planned that far ahead during their brash negotiations; he was surprised by the shrewish nature she concealed underneath. From the corner of his eye, Emilia placed her hand against her mouth and said "Oh". No, she wasn't shrewish. She was pure. She was EMT.

Emilia: "Yeah, now that you mention it, I did say that! I did say «our»! How about it? When you take that into consideration doesn't that mean that we've all passed your Examination?"

Stick Swinger: "That's an issue of semantics, ya twat. It doesn't mean that at all."

Emilia: "Oh… I see. Subaru, Beatrice, I'm sorry. He said it's not going to work…"

Beatrice: "You're giving up far too quickly, I suppose!!"

Beatrice yelled out at Emilia, who had dropped her shoulders in a crestfallen fashion and signaled her giving up with a meek look on her face. Although, Subaru too had thought it an unreasonable turn of wit once he stopped to think about it.

And that was because he had been in so much despair about the height of the wall in front of them that he had wanted to cling onto the possibility.

Stick Swinger: "Well, there's some sense to what that runt's sayin'. I also seem to remember that at first it was that ya can take as many people as ya wish so long as you try 'n get past me—— Though followin' the rules is kinda borin', so I had to drag myself awake."

Subaru: "When you say you had to drag yourself awake… You mean that stuff at the beginning was you hacking the system!?"

Stick Swinger: "I dunno, ya prick. Use words I can understand, ya prick. We ain't talkin' like that person with white hair at a young age, ya prick."

The man kept flitting back and forth between good and bad moods. As Subaru nodded lazily at the man's words to show he was paying attention, he managed to deduce something about the system part of the Examination—— Something about the man's true nature.

His deduction came from observing the Examinations on the Third and Second Floor, and then from observing the stuff which the man, who seemed to be devoid of sanity, said following his appearance and his behavior after. His inference was drawn from the things that felt out of place from each of those points.

In short, there was a vital discrepancy between the original Examination and the Examination that was going on now.

Subaru: "In truth it should have been an Examination where things would have been fine if everyone worked together to fulfill its condition, but because you «woke up» it's now become that we each have to fulfill the condition?"

Stick Swinger: "Kah! Hell as if I'd know, ya prick. But, I ain't got a clue which one of 'em would've been easier. No idea which out of killin' me using all yer combined efforts or lettin' me fondle yer tits 'n hittin' me once would've been easier…!"

Subaru: "——Don't you go saying such careless things, you perverted bastard. I'll shut you right up."

Subaru reached out for his whip so that he could lash out at him in anger for his callous words.

He pulled it out from the back of his waist and cracked it as fast as he could using only his forearm. However, the man easily caught the whip, which should have been travelling nigh at the speed of sound, in between his chopsticks and gave it a shake.

The chances that he would have been able to hit him had been low, but his surprise attack had ended up failing so spectacularly——

Stick Swinger: "Kah! I didn't think'cha were the type to be swingin' sticks, but really, a whip, ya prick? What kinda taste's that, ya prick. Whip lashes're only good for yer enemies 'n yer woman."

Subaru: "It sure as hell looks like you're my enemy though! Besides, I plan to go up the bases properly when it comes to Emilia, and that leaves me no options for using whips before going through them all!"

Beatrice: "Subaru, Subaru, calm down, in fact. I can barely understand what you're saying, I suppose. And what's more you're getting swept up by the enemy's pace, in fact!"

Emilia: "That's right Subaru! You mustn't get so upset! He just touched my chest, it's not like he did anything weird."

Subaru: "That *is* something that's weird, Emilia-tan!"

Stick Swinger: "In general it's somethin' to get upset at, smokin' hottie."

Both the man and Subaru replied to Emilia, who had been trying to calm them down, at the same time. Emilia widened her eyes at their in-sync-suggestions and Beatrice gave a deep sigh.

???: "——I wooonder~, may I say something really quickly?"

After keeping her silence for so long, someone finally spoke out in a trembling voice over to the four of them—— who had been caught up in their exchange, now all looking rather taken aback.

???: "…I don't like sayiiing~ this, but I thiiink~ we should turn back."

The little girl who had spoken out and lifted her tiny hand up had dark-blue braided hair—— Meili. She slowly shook her head, still perched on Shaula's shoulders (who had crumpled down to her knees fainted).

Meili's olive green eyes were full of unmistakable fear of the man reflected in them who stood further at the back, but yet she spoke.

Meili: "I don't know how you can speak so fluidly with that guy onii-saaan~… Our Knightly onii-san, our scarf-wearing onee-san and even our naked onee-san have been hurt by him."

Subaru: "Out of those Shaula did collapse because of other reasons, but… it's definitely weird."

Though Meili's view was pessimistic, her assessment was natural when taking into account their current fighting strength.

Rather, it was Subaru that, in trying to remain here and continue their challenge, had completely lost his composure. They'd been completely flattened by the Stick Swinger's swordsmanship.

He had been unable to remain objective with how much influence Anastasia and Julius's collapse and the sexual harassment of Emilia had had on him, however——

Subaru: "——This is just hypothetically speaking, but if we were to leave and come back again later would you still recognize her victory?"

Stick Swinger: "————"

He could even say that his sportsmanship in having recognized Emilia clearing the Examination was unretractable—— But, even though he had shown as much, the other parts that came along with it were not so easy to understand.

Even in carrying out Meili's reasonable conclusion, if their opponent did not accept it then they would not be able to avoid having to fight. Up until a short while ago their opponent had taken care not to kill them. But now that he was behaving like he had just shifted up a gear they had no surefire guarantee that their lives would not be in danger the next time they challenged him.

If it came to that then challenging him would be out of the question. Instead, he would have to use every last inch of his strength to get them out of here.

Without any exaggeration, the Stick Swinger's true strength approached cataclysmic levels.

He had made short work of Julius with his chopsticks, fought with Emilia and still had plenty of energy left to spare—— His true strength was without exaggeration Reinhard-grade. What sort of intention did this Tower's overlord have in placing such a monster here?

It seemed to him like they had no intention of letting it be cleared when taking into account the solution to the constellation-themed puzzle of the Third Floor as well.

Subaru: "Well, what will it be?"

Shifting his heels as he showed signs of his patience running out, he approached the collapsed figures of Julius and Anastasia. Taking notice of what Subaru was doing, Beatrice and Emilia subtly took up their positions as well.

If the Stick Swinger bared his fangs, Emilia would once again instantly cast her Icicle Line and they would have no choice but to pick up the three that had collapsed using Beatrice's Murak and sprint away. In the worst case, he would have to consider casting the yet incomplete third trump card with Beatrice as well——

Stick Swinger: "——Enough."

Subaru: "Huh?"

Stick Swinger: "E-N-O-U-G-H! Enoughenoughenoughenoughenoughenoughenough! I ain't in the mood for this!"

The man abruptly spat that out at them as they steeled their mind and body wholeheartedly onto their escape plan. As they goggled at his childish attitude, the man put his arm back in his left sleeve again and straightened up his robe back to how he had first worn it. Then he started to walk away moodily, away from Subaru and the others who remained on their guard—— he grumpily made his way to the Sword of Selection which had been kicked away.

The man stepped on the fallen sword, flicked it up and lazily took hold of it. Then he vigorously thrust its tip down onto the white floor and the sword returned to the same state it had been when the Examination had started. And then——

Stick Swinger: "I'm closin' up shop. Scram, ya pricks. I'm tired of this. Hurry the hell up."

He flumped down on the spot with a thunk and spat those words out, sitting with one knee raised up.

Subaru: "——W-waitwaitwait! You're freewheeling far too much, what the hell's this about!? Are you really going to haphazardly decide the particulars of the Examination depending on your mood!?"

Stick Swinger: "You sure are noisy, ya prick. The discretion here's been left to me from the start, ya prick. If I say no, then it's a no."

Subaru instinctively became speechless at hearing his arrogant manner of speaking. At Subaru's surprise, the man continued with "Besides."

Stick Swinger: "——When I don't feel like doin' somethin', I don't mess 'bout. So, are ya gonna do what I said, ya prick?"

Subaru: "————"

Subaru's whole body was bathed in chills from an intense gust of wind whooshing by.

The man had cast aside all of his weapons and even tucked away his chopsticks in his bosom pocket; and, his lips had curled. It did certainly look like a smile, but it was of a different nature to the one which he had been showing so far.

Ferocious as it was, it was no smile that gave off a sunny atmosphere. Rather his smile was like that of a crazed beast exuding a dark, sanguine, gruesome intent to kill.

???: "…Ah."

A small groan could be heard.

Not from Subaru, but from Emilia who should have been by his side. She had one of her hands against her pale throat and her jewel-like eyes were widened in surprise.

Her knees fell from beneath her and she sunk down onto the floor. It was as if she had noticed in that moment that she was unable to stand up by herself and forgotten how to breathe——

Subaru: "Ha——"

And it was the same for Subaru as well, who had suddenly become aware of his breathing as soon as he saw Emilia's reaction. Before he could even notice, Subaru had dropped to his knees in pain and his whole body was drenched in sweat.

He was in the same state as Emilia—— No, he was worse off than her. He had been completely daunted by the man's presence.

It was as if he had started to forget even that his heart was beating, and that he was starting to be killed.

If there had been no one around him to make him remember about that, he would have died from the power in the man's eyes alone.

Stick Swinger: "Go rack your brains 'n see if ya can find a way to win, ya prick. The same trick the smokin' hottie used ain't gonna cut it. Not even the sleepin' sexy woman will. Now get out of my sight, I'm hittin' the sack."

His voice grew low indicating he was not messing about when he said that, and following that, his head dozily jerked down. After a little bit, they could gradually hear the man's snoring which sounded as deafening as him when awake.

In that sense his loud snoring was not at all contrary to his personality—— However, none of those who were left standing here were able to laugh about it.

Meili: "Let's turn back from here as quickly as possiiible~."

He wanted to leave this place as quickly as possible.

Making good on Meili's words who had insisted they do just that, Subaru and the others slowly grabbed their fallen members and were forced to retreat from the Examination.

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???: "——I see. So that is the reason why you scurried back looking so glum from the Second Examination."

Subaru: "…As harsh as ever, eh, nee-sama?"

Ram: "Stop talking like that. Every time you do, the Master-sama Theory of the sleeping woman holds more weight to it."

Subaru: "That's crazy talk! Mind what you say."

Ram gave a short sigh as he feebly shrugged his shoulders at her unappealing warning.

They were on the Fourth Floor, in the room adjacent to the Green Room. Subaru and Ram were vis-a-vis with each other, and Emilia, Beatrice and Meili were there too. The number became six with the inclusion of Shaula, who they had rolled in here as the final member.

The group had climbed down the long, long staircase and fled the Second Floor. The first thing they had done was carry their wounded to the Green Room and entrust them to the Spirit's treatment.

Their diagnosis on the way was that Julius had simply only fainted, whereas with Anastasia the underlying reason was exhaustion due to having used too much magic; in all, their lives were not in danger.

Therefore they had placed them in bed, and moved rooms with Ram so that he could explain the situation to her, that and to get around the room's people-limit as well. However——

Ram: "I heard that there was a ridiculous Examiner too, but… It was just Emilia-sama that was acknowledged by him, right? Was it not possible for just the one person to see the library?"

Subaru: "That's…"

Emilia: "Oh, I hadn't thought about that now that you mention it. Right, I may have been able to go up to the First Floor if it was just me… Should we try asking the Stick Swinger-san if I can…?"

Subaru: "…No, let's not. I don't want to stir up the hornet's nest and risk him getting irritated again; and even if he told Emilia-tan that she can go up by herself, that… That would be dangerous."

Emilia: "I'll be reaaally careful you know?"

Subaru: "It's dangerous."

Ram: "It is dangerous."

Beatrice: "It's dangerous, I suppose."

Subaru, Ram and Beatrice immediately put a damper on Emilia's determination. Emilia dejectedly stood down after she heard their concerns, but it was not like Subaru had been stamping out her willingness out of being overprotective.

Right now he wished to not aggravate that Stick Swinger for no good reason. This he was absolutely sure about.

It was true that he felt like he wanted to say something to that untrammeled individual, but it would be suicidal to challenge him when he was in a bad mood regardless of when the Examination would recommence.

And the fact was that, right now, they had not even seen the man taking up the sword.

Even if only Emilia had been able to get past that man——

Subaru: "I'm doubtful about whether the Examination of the Second Floor truly is just that one part. He could easily be playing us the foo… No, it may just seem like that to me because Emilia-tan overcame it without much issue, but I wonder if that's truly the end of it; that's what's weighing on my mind."

Emilia: "I think you're thinking too much about it. That individual… Though the things he says may be a little strange and rude, sometimes it doesn't seem like he'd lie. No, it's because it seems like he's a person who can't lie."

Subaru: "The jury's split right through the middle here on whether it's just you having faith in him or good shrewdness being the reason he can't tell lies…"

Whatever the case might be, he had no grounds to brush aside Emilia's point. If anything, he agreed with the assessment she had given regarding that Stick Swinger.

Were he to look at it from a different angle, the reason she had overcome the Examination so readily could also be because Emilia was the strongest out of them. So when it came to Julius right now, the fact that he had collapsed meant that——

Subaru: "I hope he's not depressed as hell about it…"

Emilia: "Are you worried about Julius?"

Subaru: "I'm not entirely sure. You see, when it comes to being worried, I guess I am… But, it's not as easy as that."

Julius's mano-a-mano with the Stick Swinger, his subsequent defeat and his beaten figure, had been seared into his mind. He probably was not overthinking his anxiety when he looked back on how Julius had looked in his last moments.

His skill with the sword had been nowhere near his opponent's, he had been toyed with like it had been child's play, and finally even his Knight's Sword had been broken——

Subaru: "There's another sword in our dragon carriage, but that isn't going to be the issue here I imagine."

Beatrice: "Swords can be reforged. I really don't get all the fuss, I suppose."

Subaru: "But Beako, don't you take good care of the handkerchief, mittens and apron I made you? What I'm saying is that those things are more special, and it's as if they were torn."

Beatrice: "…I apologize for saying something so stupid, in fact."

Beatrice meekly took back her callous remark and Subaru stroked her head, letting out a sigh.

It was hard to imagine how Julius would react upon waking up in the Green Room. Even though he did not know whether he would get depressed (unlike his usual self) or whether he would try to act strong like he usually did, Subaru had no clue what he would say to him when he eventually did; for that reason he was feeling quite downhearted.

And when it came to things to worry about, that did not stop only with Julius.

Subaru: "Anastasia… Echidna's… That desperation, what on earth was she thinking…"

One doubt that firmly clung to Subaru's mind was Anastasia, or rather, Eridna's decision when she had butted in Julius's duel with the Stick Swinger and provided him support.

There was no question that in that moment she had been providing backup for Julius. The reason why she had tried her utmost to help him when he had been overwhelmed like that was one which everyone, including Subaru, would have been feeling as well.

Nevertheless, touching on the matter briefly, that which Echidna had done, considering that she was moving about using Anastasia's body who had remained a bystander in all this, went beyond being surprising and more so warranted fright.

Even during their journey and after arriving at the Watchtower, Echidna had not forgotten to behave like Anastasia; she had kept asserting that she would do her very best to act with due consideration for her body. He had figured that at least in his eyes she would not have turned against that.

What meaning did she have in coming here and all of a sudden behaving like that——?

Beatrice: "That girl's indisposition is gravely different to a little overuse of magic, I suppose."

Subaru: "——Then what is it?"

Beatrice was the only one who shared knowledge of the situation regarding Anastasia and Echidna, and she quietly whispered those words into the brooding Subaru's ear.

When Subaru posed his question, Beatrice continued her words by saying "To put it simply,"

Beatrice: "Bubby, Betty and that Scarf are special among Spirits, in fact. We're all more powerful than lots of other Spirits, but we make up for it by having other restrictions instead, I suppose. I needn't have to explain it to you now, in fact."

Subaru: "Mhm. Since you want me all to yourself by me signing a Contract with you, I cannot sign a Contract with other Spirits. You can rest assured that I'm yours, Beako."

Beatrice: "It-it's nothing as cheerful as that, I suppose. This is more about that Scarf-Spirit, in fact. It's true that she's borrowing that girl's body… But, I realized something as we made our way here, I suppose. That girl has no magic to her which she can use other than her Od, in fact."

Subaru: "None other than her… Od?"

Beatrice: "She's the same as you, there's a defect in her Gate, I suppose. Its valve is broken and its ability of drawing in Mana from the outside is ruined, in fact. So she can't use magic unless she whittles down her own life, I suppose."

Subaru: "Then that means…"

It can be fatal, Subaru gulped at that realization.

Subaru was in shock of the problems Anastasia's body bore. They would be severe handicaps in a world like this.

He recalled the words which Anastasia, or rather Eridna, had said before, "My trump card whittles at my body". She had meant those words literally.

And now that this fact had become clear, Subaru had ended up becoming more and more bewildered.

If in fact Echidna's misuse of Anastasia's body had been for nothing other than to shorten her host's life, then——

Subaru: "Why did she always try to help Julius?"

It did not appear like it had been something she had done out of some intricate plan. Undoubtedly, taking this risk from worry of Julius's condition must have been behind that act of desperation.

Was Echidna attracted to Julius? Was that one of the powers of his Divine Protection of Gathering Spirits as well?

Ram: "——I am worried about Anastasia-sama and the Knight Julius as well, but we have other issues that we need to deal with, don't we?"

Subaru: "I guess you mean that Stick Swinger."

Ram: "That is correct. It may seem cold hearted, but for me what we shall do about the Examination is more important—— If we cannot get past it, then we will not find a way to get Rem back."

Ram interrupted Subaru's thoughts and, in a sense, voiced quite a cold-hearted opinion.

Just as she had acknowledged, her words were a little lacking in consideration. But, Subaru was not going to blame her for that.

Ram: "————"

He could not see it, but he could feel a tinge of irritation concealed behind Ram's stiff expression. That was because she was frustrated that she was now an arm's reach away frp, the possibility of getting back, but yet still so far; Subaru could sympathize with that.

Emilia: "He dressed casually, had an eyepatch, red hair, blue eyes… He had an awfully self-assertive, violent physique though."

Subaru: "Did anyone familiar come to your mind? If you don't see the real thing, you probably won't be able to imagine him, but he's with no exaggeration strong as a monster. Maybe around Reinhard-grade."

Ram: "A real nightmare, huh."

Emilia: "Though what Subaru's saying is no lie. I've never seen Reinhard's true strength… But, well, I think he was as strong as that."

Emilia followed up Ram's words, detailing her thoughts having actually fought the man.

There was no benefit in telling lies here. From her judgement, Ram wearily placed her hand against her forehead, and said,

Ram: "If we put confidence in Barusu and Emilia-sama's words, then our enemy is of the same caliber as the Knight Reinhard… If as said they truly are equal to the world's strongest man, then there is one that is at least close to his level in every country of the world."

Subaru: "So essentially Reinhard is the strongest in the Kingdom, and each of the other three countries have their own strongest."

Ram: "In the Vollachian Empire, there is the First General, the Blue Lightning, Cecilus Segmunt; in the Holy Kingdom of Gusteko, there is the Crazed Prince; and in the Kararagi City States, there is the Admirer, Halibel. But each have different traits to them."

Subaru: "None of them have long red hair?"

Ram: "I am not sure because we only do not know what the Holy Kingdom of Gusteko's Crazed Prince looks like."

Subaru: "Prince, a prince, huh…? I guess he didn't give off that kind of feeling?"

But then, he was not so sure if he was a complete mismatch with that individual, when he took into account the "Crazed" part. Although he had quite handsome features, he could not say he had any royal elegance to him.

It was the sort of beauty one would find in the plains, the kind one would find in the wilderness, so it was a work of art of the kind that was permitted.

Subaru: "And to add to that, he's a master of martial arts whose name isn't known in the world…"

Beatrice: "The clothes he was wearing were the native dress of Kararagi, in fact. He was using chopsticks too, I suppose."

Subaru: "Oh boy, was he using them, though way too differently to the way they're supposed to be used…"

Besides, no matter how much Subaru strained himself, he was unlikely to find a connection between "a master of martial arts who was unknown to the world", and that man.

The man was a bit older than Subaru—— Most likely in his mid-twenties. However, he felt that something was not quite right in regards to there being such a skilled man of that age with such a twisted nature ending up being unknown, and that feeling took precedence.

Moreover.

There was still a doubt troubling him, regarding whether the man who had been placed there by this Pleiades Watchtower's strange mechanism was really just some randomer——

Meili: "Ah, onii-san, can I butt in for a seeec~?"

Subaru: "Hm?"

Meili: "Doesn't it look like naked onee-san's about to wake uuup~?"

Meili, who had been busy giving Shaula a lap-pillow, raised her hand up from a corner of the room. And just as she had said, Shaula, with her head still resting against Meili's lap, captivatingly stretched out her body and started to groan, "Ummph, aaanh."

Then she slowly opened her eyes as everyone else looked on at her——

Shaula: "Maaaster… Don't leave me alone please… I don't wanna be alone anymore…"

Subaru: "Stop acting so miserable from the get-go! You were up all along, weren't you!"

Shaula: "Geez. In a strange way I thought you might show your affection Master, but it turns out you're meeean~ as always. Butbut, I looove~ that part of you too."

Subaru: "Looks like I was worried for nothing…"

Shaula lifted her long legs up, swung them down and nimbly got up. She shook her so-called scorpiontail about and looked around the room; then she cocked her head and said "Oh?".

Shaula: "Huh? Why are we here? If I'm not mistaken, we got through the Examination with one of Master's dramatic flashes and made it up…"

Subaru: "Oy, this isn't a dream. This is reality."

Shaula: "You were hugging meee~ Master, and you started to laugh, telling me to not let go again…"

Subaru: "That was a dream! You fainted straight after the Second Examination started!"

Subaru shouted that at Shaula as she recited the contents of her horrifying dream. Then he tried to remind her about what had happened just before she had fainted. However, Shaula snorted her nose and said "Fainted~?", as if she was playing dumb,

Shaula: "Meee~, faint? There's no way I'd do something so shameful. Even after I reunited with you Master after so many centuries, I didn't end up fainting, you know? Meee~, fainting, you're gonna reduce me to tears saying something so absurd!"

Emilia: "Um, I get that you're tempted to doubt this, but you really did faint. Subaru and Meili were reaaally worried about you. Believe me."

Shaula: "Huuuh~! Master worried about me!? Dhehehe, I believe you."

Subaru: "That was easy…"

Meili: "Me being tacked on like an extra, now that's a liiittle~ unexpected."

Both Subaru and Meili looked troubled as they witnessed Shaula fawningly express her opinion as she slackened her expression. Nevertheless, after she acknowledged the reality of the present, Shaula cocked her head the other way and said "Huuuh?"

Shaula: "But what caused me to faint? It's not usual for meee~ to collapse. In those kinds of situations it wouldn't be strange if everyone ended up dead other than Master…"

Ram: "I get that you are pinning too much hope on Barusu… Sorry, on your Master, but that which I have heard really happened. Take your time and think back to earlier… Picture the long, long staircase in front of your eyes."

Emilia: "The long, long staircase…"

Was Ram trying to get her to follow her memories and recall what had happened? She spoke in a hushed voice as if she were hypnotizing her. There should have been a hitch in Ram's plan in that she had not witnessed that scene, yet she slowly unraveled Shaula's locked memories as if she had been there to see it.

Ram: "You are greeted by a white room with a steel sword thrust down into the floor. The moment someone lays their hands on it a strange voice echoes in the minds of everyone present——"

Emilia: "My heart's pounding…"

Both Shaula and Emilia were reliving the experience thanks to Ram's emotional recitation. Setting Shaula aside, Emilia ought to know about what had happened in detail; but Subaru did not interject in fear that he would break the mold of the conversation.

Finally, her recitation approached Shaula's sealed memories——

Ram: "Right then, the silhouette of a person materializes at the back of the room. A man with red, long hair, blue eyes and dressed in exotic garb…"

Shaula: "AAAAAAAAAH!!"

Shaula jumped back and let out a shriek the moment Ram reached that crucial scene. She turned to face Subaru, preparing to jump towards him; however, he had anticipated it. He bent his knees and caught her. This time he did not fall.

Instead, he was pressed against Shaula's soft skin as if he were in a vice.

Subaru: "OWOWOWOW! I-I guess you remembered! You remembered right!?"

Shaula: "W-w-w-why is that guy here!? In spite of all of you telling me he was dead! He survived! I knew he was a guy who's nigh unkillable!"

Subaru: "Huuuh!? What are you sayi…"

As his eyes teared up in pain, Subaru tried to ask Shaula what she was talking about—— And then, it dawned on him.

He realized what Shaula's words meant.

The person in question that corresponded to what she had said since they had come to the Tower was only one. And that person was——,

Shaula: "The Stick Swinger! The Stick Swinger, Reid! That savage! That demon! He's come back to life to fondle my chest again——!"

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——Reid Astrea.

That was the name of the swordsman who had gone down in legend.

A great swordsman who was said to have killed Witchbeasts, masters of the sword, dragons and finally even Witches.

He was the first person to have received the name Sword Saint, and was also one of the Three Great Heroes who saved the world.

He had kickstarted the glory of the Astrea family, the lineage of the Sword Saint which Reinhard van Astrea was a part of; even now he was the highest aspiration of those who lived by the sword——

The situation was hard to believe. His name was the name of a life that should have perished four-hundred years ago. He probably would have laughed at the possibility existing, were it not for this place having existed for centuries, a Tower that had been built by those connected to the Witch.

Nevertheless, there was a living witness here who knew about four-hundred years ago.

Nevertheless, they were in a Tower built here by the Sage who had lived four-hundred years ago.

Upon taking into consideration his poor character, didn't he seem to be saying something like "I've placed the First Generation Sword Saint as the Strongest Guard here, now surpass him"——

Subaru and the others hurriedly went back to the Green Room with the facts they had gathered.

They would have to come up with a game plan, now that they knew that their enemy was Reid Astrea. Luckily, he had heard that that particular Sword Saint had been a man who was not lacking in anecdotes.

And luckily, they had a talented person in their group who was well read on the greats of bygone days.

Of course, he would imagine that the aftereffects of his defeat lingered within him. But once he found out about his opponent's identity, the shame he probably harbored should vanish too. After all, their opponent was to blame for this.

At any rate, their enemy was the Sword Saint—— A man who held the same family name as Reinhard and became its founder, building the name up.

Thinking of it like that, he should be able to easily digest even his defeat to him——

Subaru: "——That dumbass."

Subaru had made his way back to the Green Room harboring those words of comfort. But once he got there, he spoke those words out in a hushed tone.

There were beds of grass at the back of the room which the Spirit had laid out for the wounded—— There were four of them in total, and laying in them were Rem, Anastasia and Patrasche in the backmost one.

Only one of those beds were empty, the one between Patrasche and Anastasia.

And on top of that ivy-woven bed, lay merely his broken Knight's sword.

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——The man slowly opened his eyes to the sound of footsteps clambering up the stairs and the aura of a man readying himself to fight piercing through his skin.

He felt no anger at having his sleep interrupted. After all, life was a constant battle.

Once you came to the resolution that your flesh and blood was always walking the tightrope between life and death, you would up living without any turmoil in your heart, no matter what would transpire.

???: "————"

Gradually the figure of the man who was climbing up the stairs came into view. He could remember that man's swordsmanship. He could even remember that man's footsteps and his footwork. It had only been a short while ago. There was no way he could forget.

Only, that should have been the same for his opponent too, so he thought it was strange.

He had thought that his opponent was a little smarter than this, nevertheless——

???: "————"

Man: "Kah!"

He lost that impression as soon as he looked at his opponent's eyes. An impulse had surged through him that had led him to scoff instead.

He sumptuously let it echo on top of his tongue and then briskly scratched his red hair. And——

Man: "I ain't gonna be just playin' 'bout this time, ya prick."

???: "————"

He did not believe think there would be any meaning to saying that, but he cast his words out of courtesy, just in case.

When his opponent received them, he closed his eyes for a moment and instantly threw away all of this emotion.

Then, his opponent stretched out his hand without any hesitation—— And pulled out the sword that had been thrust down into the floor and held it out in front of him.

Julius: "Belonging to the Royal Guards of the Kingdom of Lugunica, Julius Juukulius."

Man: "————"

After he gave his name, the Knight broke into a fierce run as a result of his own eyes narrowing. The man—— Reid Astrea bent his lips into a twisted smile.

Reid: "Ya couldn't even hope to be my playmate so long as ya keep usin' that borin' title.[94]"

[94] Rough translation of a note from Tappei at the end of the Chapter: "Perhaps, when they retreated from the room, Subaru carried Julius on his back, Emilia princess-carried Anastasia, and Beako and Meili carried Shaula together by her arms and legs sort of like a stretcher. Shaula felt lighter, but Beako and Meili were exhausted and dropped her half-way down the stairs and Emilia-tan had to frantically catch her as she tumbled down. In the end, Emilia-tan carried both Anastasia and Shaula against both of her shoulders, and it appeared like she went downstairs with them whilst keeping Beako and Meili's spirits up."

Arc 6 Chapter 28 – Julius Juukulius

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 5 “Julius Juukulius”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (GracedHarperd, PaperKaminari) — Complete

——I am afraid, that no one would believe it.

???: “My name is Natsuki Subaru! Servant of the Roswaal mansion—— and one and only Knight to Emilia-sama, Royal Candidate!”

At that moment, almost everyone in the hall of the Royal Castle turned their heads towards the self-proclaimed Knight.

The one speaking, unable to hide his tendency to get swept up by the flow and by his somewhat fickle emotions, had stated thus—— And upon hearing it, there had been a single person, a single man who had been deeply moved.

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Picking up the Sword of Selection from the ground, he felt it fit so perfectly in the palm of his hand, very much so that the urge to break into tears arose within him for some reason. It was almost as if he truly were under the delusion that the sword had selected him in particular.

Even though, in this instant, there was absolutely no reason for him to be feeling so proud in such a manner, within his own self.

Julius: “Sh—— Hk!”

Compared to his broken beloved sword, his new blade felt a smidgeon thicker, the tip heavier. However, if he based himself on that and swung the blade, he would be able to more or less get used to the differences immediately.

Not all battles could be handled with only the usage of a weapon one was accustomed to. It was a source of pride for him, that he had trained himself to imagine all possible situations, and that he was able to do battle with any sword at hand.

Reid: “Really borin’, haa, ya prick.”

His sharp thrust was carried by said pride, and it was aimed right between the yawning man’s brows. However, the man just tilted his head, the tip of the blade merely coming close to its target. As soon as the scarlet-haired man noticed a few hairs having been severed, he jumped back.

He pressed his weight hard against the ground and jumped back, thanks to his heels remaining hot due to the footwork.

He formed some distance between the two of them.

In a battle, evaluating the sword skills of one’s opponent was not the only essential thing. Neither was it about just the sword in the hands. The rhythm of the feet and the pace of the legs were likewise extremely crucial.

Of course, the swordplay mattered as well. To get the optimum position, to get the fastest pace, in order to maximize one’s potential, one must not use only their hands and legs; instead one must use every part of your body.

Therefore, it was imperative that beginners in the art of swordplay learn proper footwork first and foremost.

Truly, he believed he had been fortunate to be blessed with a great teacher. Although that teacher’s skills were now below his current skills, this was due to age, a factor that no one was able to circumvent.

Nevertheless, there was no doubt that he was quite a skillful person in teaching things to his students even beyond their own strength. He enjoyed speaking not only about the practice of swordsmanship, but also how such an art came to be, and in what form it had been passed down.

Naturally, there was enjoyment in listening to such things. Naturally, there was honor in being able to practice such things.

Julius: “————”

Catching up towards the man with a leap, he aimed his sword down to where the man was about to land.

Up, down, left, right. Three of those directions were guarded, and the one with the highest probability to deliver the killing blow was from below.

Reid: “This again, ya prick.”

His sword, which swung towards the man’s chest from below, was parried with ease by the man’s stick. Jabbing into the blade’s path and coming into contact with it, the stick easily deflected his sword. Even if he had seen it coming, the sword swing took less than a second—— to be able to do that meant the man was exceedingly skilled and had fine-grained control over his power, to the extent that he could even thread a needle with ease.

Julius: “——Hk.”

He gasped in surprise as his heavy swing brought his sword over his head. It created a small opening as he stumbled slightly and broke posture, and he thought to use a blade of wind—— but right now, that choice was unavailable to him.

The magic which he could use as a diversion, did not release. Instead, only a weak spot was created.

Julius: “Kaaagh!”

He ate a front kick to his side, and the bare foot’s nails dug into the gaps between his internal organs. In the moment he felt that his body was incapable of taking any more pressure and was about to break, the foot that had been stuck inside him twisted, causing his viscera excruciating, screaming pain.

He was blown away. In an instant, he went flying from the impact, seemingly defying inertia.

However, even that was not enough to absorb the force of that kick. As his surroundings spun, the impact he received on his body reverberated to his head and gave rise to an urge to retch. Even so, He kept his eyes on his opponent and slammed his feet on the ground as he landed, maintaining his posture.

His breathing was rough. It would take him some time to recover and catch his breath.

He emptied the contents of his lungs, exhaling the entirety of the oxygen in his body. And after having done so, after all the contents of his body had been expelled, he forcibly reminded his body to breathe slowly, as to calm his ragged breath.

Reid: "————"

Breathe, breathed[95]. After that, he would continue the battle, because he had to continue this fight.

Julius: "————"

He saw the red-haired man standing with a smile plastered on his smug face, about ten meters away.

Again, he dashed forward, towards the grinning man. The edges of the wooden chopsticks and the steel blade collided, everything to peel that calm smile off his face. From there, the real battle——

Reid: "So pretentious. There are truths and lies in a battle, ya prick. Are ya really readin' it out of a picture book?!"

Julius: "——Ah."

The distance between him and the man shrunk in the blink of an eye. The man's incredible speed left him stunned.

To be precise, it all actually happened in the blink of an eye. The man closed the distance of ten meters in a mere moment. A simple stick appeared in front of his own eyes. In order to protect himself, he immediately raised his blade, though while making that important action, he left the rest of his body unguarded. This resulted in two chopstick blows being delivered onto him, one to the side of his head and one to the chest.

A piercing shock hit him. The sharpness of that blow would make his consciousness fade faster than the actual pain. He clenched his teeth and stomped the ground vigorously, so he could desperately scrape back together his own fading consciousness.

[95] A small curiosity, the verb used here, "吐く", can also mean "to vomit". Both would be correct.

Julius: “Ohhh, ah!”

Howling in a baritone, he swung his sword in a crescent-form arc towards the man. The man jumped, as if he was avoiding the graceful dance until death and struck his side with his elbow. His consciousness was shaken again.

He was thrown off his feet, and his fighting spirit was curbed by the pain that gradually spread out in his soles. Henceforth, he opted for the strike his body was most accustomed to.

Simultaneous chants of fire and water, a three-way attack together with the sword——all missed their mark.

There was neither fire nor ice, for this was merely an artistic mistake which he had repeatedly made when he was training and training and training to the point of being labelled “the Finest”. If his opponent were a normal one, this surely would have had sufficient to down them.

Reid: “Bang!”

The highest peak of a Knight’s swordsmanship, it was easily blown away by the chopsticks in the hands of the man.

The sticks struck his knee and stabbed his stomach, making him vomit up gastric juice; it was quite the unpleasant sight. Being continuously struck down by the stick from all directions, his body was about to collapse.

Reid: “Ohh?”

He fell back instead of forward, and kept his body up by quickly extending out his arm. Taking advantage of this moment, he let loose a swing of his leg using his backwards rotation with astonishing momentum. A sound escaped the man because he had not expected it, and yet he evaded it.

He continued to rotate backwards, and opened up a greater distance between the two of them. Blood was pouring out of his nose. He wiped it with his white sleeve. His uniform was stained by bright, crimson red paint. Unpleasant.

He did not care. He let out a sharp breath and put his whole spirit into the blade in his right hand.

To reach it, was to keep going for it. To be strong, was to stay strong.

Reid: “Ya’re fucking pathetic, ya prick. Can you even lift yer sword, ya prick? Haven’t lifted my sword for anythin’ else for three months straight, ya prick. I’ve cut light down, the fuck’ve ya cut down?”

Julius: “You, right here, right now——”

Reid: “The fuck does that mean, ya prick. The fuck can ya do to me, ya prick? Ya can’t do shit. No swingin’ at it ‘til ya reach it. Don’t swing at it ‘til ya reach it. ’Til ya can, no swingin’. Don’t swing ‘til ya can. Stop talkin’ ‘bout all the shit ya wanna do when ya can’t even do ‘em, ya prick.”

Instead of a refutation, he utterly destroyed the sword’s blow with immense, immense strength.

As a response to this action, the man struck ten more blows down onto him.

Julius: “————”

His consciousness was swaying, but he was not falling. Why was he not falling? It was because——

Reid: “Lackin’, ya prick. ‘Tis ain’t enough, ya prick. This ain’t a place for ya to be comin’ to. Ya’re outta yer element. Y’ain’t the one for the job. Ya weren’t invited.”

He just must be strong. He just must prove it with his sword.

A name, a house, a family, a master, a companion, a friend, Spirits bound to his soul, he had lost all of those.

The only thing that was left for him, was this. All that he had left, was himself.

What he himself had accumulated, shapeless, that was all that remained.

This was the only proof of his sole, own being.

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by Y_alruqaishi (source)

Reid: “Disgustin’, ya prick. Are you tryin’ to put up a front, ya prick? Are ya satisfied just bein’ a cheap imitation of others, ya prick? Ya and yer sword are both fuckin’ boring.”

There had been a time in which he had aimed for the peak of swordsmanship.

He had once wondered if he could aim for that place, it was something that had been stuck on his mind.

Soon, he realized that the bar was set too high, and gave up.

When he saw him, that man with hair of crimson, the boy gripping a sword in his hand, he discovered he carried something so selflessly grand as to inspire admiration.

Reid: “Ain’t nobody lookin’ at’cha. Ain’t nobody got expectations on ya. Ya’re naive if ya thinkin’ I’m playin’ ‘round. Yer punches ‘n kicks are easy, ya prick.”

He too had once yearned for it, for his life to be filled with tales of grandeur.

To stand shoulder to shoulder with those people, was not to be for his current lacking self.

That was the reason why he must risk his life. So desperately, wretchedly, that dream which he had then cast aside, he remembered.

Julius: “————”

His blue eye, not covered by the eyepatch, along with his disheveled long hair of flame, overlapped with the youth who had been the impetus behind him desisting of his dream once before, as well as with one of his many aspirations he held thereafter.

Diligently endeavoring in the hopes of one day reaching it, that was how he believed his life to have been spent.

Reid: “Ain’t enough, ya prick. Y’ain’t enough at all—— Have ya been skippin’ life?”

His yearning towards that what he craved for, was knocked out from him by the beating of the stick.

He could not do it by swinging his sword; it was impossible to hit the one facing him with a sword. Efforts to keep fighting were meaningless. The blood and sweat that had been shed were worthless. In this life

of his, the life that was collapsing, there was one thing. But even that one thing he believed in, was trampled down.

Julius: “————”

Slowly, something was welling withinside him.

That thing, it completely eliminated that what was emerging from his heart.

Reid: “Grrr! Can ya bear this? I’m gettin’ more and more bored, ya prick.”

Along with a click of his lips, a light gushed out and pierced through his limbs.

He collapsed like a marionette who had its strings cut. However, violence did not allow that.

Chest was struck. His breath caught. His hair was grabbed, and he was swung around like a ragdoll. He was slammed to the ground, and the moment that he bounced back up, he received a kick to the face and was blown away. In this way, he slid across the ground as if he were a frisbee, spinning endlessly in this white world with no boundaries.

He was knocked to the ground. His body bounced, he looked at the direction where he had received the kick from. But the man, who suddenly dashed like a gale towards him, hit him in the face with his knee. In the moment of the impact, knee clashed against forehead, and as his forehead split he was flicked away.

A gap between them was formed. Reorganizing his posture—— that was what he should have done, but, his body did not stir.

Julius: “Fuh, khhh…”

His whole body was screaming like a siren. The damage to his head was especially grave. Even the consciousness inside his own skull was in a state of fluctuation. He was afraid that if he did relax, if only for a little, he would lose his consciousness the very next moment.

The sword… Where was the sword? As if to ascertain it, he made his own strength flow into his own right hand and tried to slowly touch it. There, there was indeed the touch of the hilt. He felt relief.

He could not let go. There was only this. He did not know what else was left to lose if even the sword were lost.

——In other words, what was in his hand was something else in the shape of a Sword just now.

Julius: "————"

He did not make any mistakes in his own way of being. He always believed that it was him being on his own path.

He was so convinced, even now. Even now, to be able to change this, he had supposed would be impossible in his life.

Henceforth, the problem here was that he had not found a solution for all the things that had slipped out of his hands and disappeared.

——Or, was it simply a mistake?

He had lost his own way, he had walked down the wrong path, all because he had misunderstood what he believed in?

His name, his house, his family, his master, a companion, a friend, Spirits bound to his soul, he lost all of them.

What if, what was only left with him now, was just a make-believe, incapable of offering any actual help, incapable of relying upon, incapable of any support.

——He would maintain his strength; that was what he had sworn to his Master.

——He would remember his strength; that was what his last remaining friend had told him.

In a world where everything had been lost, only that Strength would support his body.

Although, this Strength was the only thing his frail and fragile self was Certain would not disappear.

Reid: "——The hesitation's finally gone from yer sword, ya prick."

Julius: "——!?"

How much time had been wasted by asking himself how to answer that question?

Probably not even a second. However, for a man—— for a Sword Saint, such instantaneously gap would be akin to having the chance of killing the enemy.

He was desperate to raise his sword, to defend himself against this rapid, impending attack.

A very sharp, shrill noise rang out. The only way of knowing that the sword's steel edge crashed upon the floor, was by actually seeing it happen.

Finally, he was parted from even the sword that slipped out from his own hands.

Losing my name, losing my reputation… Now that I even lost the sword, is there any reason for me to still stand here?

Reid: "Ya lack the qualifications to reach the Heavenly Sword—— Ya prick, ya wouldn't even be fit to be my follower."

The parched voice coldly announced that, and the Sword Saint held his sticks out forward, bending his knees down.

——For the first time, the Sword Saint had adopted an attacking posture.

Then, the stick was raised, and a strike—— There was no way for it to be mistaken, it was the strike of a sword.

He released an absolute sword strike, and wrapped in the powerful shockwave of the strike, he was blown away.

Julius: "————"

Whether punching or kicking, this blow was completely different from all the attacks so far.

This was no attack. This was the zenith of the sword, the highest peak the sword could reach, the true Strength a sword was capable of.

Engulfed by the light, his consciousness was blown away.

Was he laying his eyes upon death? Was he laying his eyes upon something that surpassed death? He did not understand it at all.

However, at the moment of being blown away, he heard a faint voice.

???: “Julius——!!”

A voice was screaming, it was full of melancholy.

Desperately, the voice had dashed up the long staircase, as if just to witness this decisive moment alone.

Since there was a voice calling for him, a very untimely smile was formed on his face.

The Finest of Knights. From the Dragon Kingdom of Lugunica, one of the Royal Guards. The eldest son and the heir of the Juukulius family. The Knight of the Royal Candidate, Anastasia Hoshin.

——Julius Juukulius.

Julius: “Ha…”

I wonder, am I even worthy of being called by that name anymore?

Finally, with such doubts on his mind, Julius’s consciousness, interrupted with a swoosh, was thus swallowed by the light[96].

[96] Something interesting I have found: throughout his named chapter, Julius’s name is never used in narration until the very end. May be a subtle nod to the fact he’s having his named Chapter while he remains in a Name-eaten state.

Arc 6 Chapter 29 - Loser[97]

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 5 “Julius Juukulius”, Parts 3-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——He had run up the long, long staircase to reach him, but by the time he did it was already too late.

???: “————”

He had forced out a shout despite his heavy panting, overworking his already strained lungs.

But neither his voice nor his words held the power to change the situation. The lack of power words held here was growing into more of an issue, especially now that the two of them were pitting techniques of the sword against each other.

Though he did not even know if he could call it something like “pitting techniques of the sword against each other”.

Because it had all been so one-sided, and no matter how much he embellished it, the weapons that one of them wielded were naught but sticks.

——The white light spread out, dying the already white room in a more brilliant white.

What was causing it, was unclear. Regardless of whether it was something sired from the nature of this aberration of a swordsman or because it was a swing which he had boasted could even cut light, the blow came accompanied with a shockwave that swept across the room.

[97] The title is written in Engrish (ルーザー), so my wish would be to flip this to Japanese (perhaps “負け犬” as it doubles as “failure”). But given it’s an iconic chapter, I’ll leave it as-is.

The individual caught in the attack's line of fire was engulfed by the light as well and blown away without being able to do anything about it.

Then literally in the blink of an eye, the light vanished, and the tall figure of the one-sleeved red-haired man filled the room—— Along with the figure of the purple haired swordsman who had collapsed like a corpse.

???: "Hey, aren't'cha that small fry, ya prick."

The red-haired man called out casually to Subaru who was at a loss for words at what he had just witnessed. Without missing a beat, the man smiled at him like a shark, as if he had forgotten all about the duel he had just been having.

Then he pointed at the fallen Swordsman—— At Julius,

???: "Ya're too late ya prick. I've already cleaned up here, 'n I'm gettin' the whiff that ya're gonna be a pain in the ass, so hurry 'n pick him up 'n get yer ass outta here."

Subaru: "…Reid Astrea."

Reid: "The fuck, ya prick. Don't go stickin' your nose into people's names, ya prick. Don't rain on my parade, it's way cooler not givin' out names, ya prick."

The Stick Swinger—— or rather, Reid's mood had taken a turn for the worse upon being called by his name.

Though Subaru felt annoyed at how completely beside the point his remarks were, he did not dare take any rash actions. He instead slowly moved his gaze away from Reid towards the still-collapsed Julius.

Reid: "I ain't gonna grab ya and gobble ya up ya know, ya prick. Ya don't have to keep starin' at me."

Subaru: "I'm sorry, but it's common sense where I'm from to not look away when you've ran into a bear. As for Julius…"

With his gaze still set on Reid and his guard up, Subaru leaned down and made sure that Julius was still breathing. He had lost consciousness, but he could feel him breathing on his palm when he placed it just above his mouth.

It looked like he was still alive despite taking that sword slash full-on. Subaru was relieved by that.

Subaru: “Isn’t this pretty kind of you, considering you’d said that the next time you wouldn’t be going easy on us.”

Reid: “Not really. Bein’ defeated by chopsticks ‘n scurryin’ back home’s lamer than being killed by ‘em, don’t’cha think, ya prick? That’s what I think. I’d rather die than show my miserable self to anyone. So I defeat ‘em with my chopsticks ‘n let ‘em scurry back home.”

Subaru: “Let me take back what I said about you being kind, fucking asshole.”

Reid: “Kah! Ya never make any sort of impression, no matter what it is ya say, small fry. ‘Sides, I got no intention to test y’all anymore today. Though, I’ll beat’cha up if ya wanna try me. Like that guy below ya.”

Reid scratched his abs with his right hand and pointed at Subaru and Julius respectively with the chopsticks in his left.

Regardless of how angry he was at Reid’s attitude right now, Subaru had no way of making him take back his rudeness.

Subaru: “Damnit.”

Reid: “Oh, ohh, go on. Don’t just stay silent while carrying your comrade, go ahead ‘n behave like a sore loser. That’s the smart ‘n easy thing to do, if it makes ya feel any better. As bad as it is tho’.”

Reid narrowed his cold blue eyes and spat that out as he sat himself down with a thunk. Meanwhile, Subaru somehow managed to hoist the collapsed Julius up whilst being subjected to the victor’s delight.

Subaru was forced to carry Julius on his back just like he’d had to an hour ago. His unconscious body was quite heavy, not to mention he was taller than him. It was a complete mess, but in times of difficulty one would have to make some sacrifices.

Because leaving Julius behind, here, by himself, was not an option.

Reid: “——Next time, bring one of those good lookin’ women along, ya prick. Like that smokin’ hottie even for example.”

Without mentioning any of their names even once, Reid waved them goodbye.

Faced with Reid's flippant attitude, Subaru could literally do nothing more than just retreat from here wordlessly.

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Subaru: "…Huu, huu."

One foot after the other, step-by-step, Subaru went down the staircase whilst taking care of where he was placing his feet.

Though the staircase was fairly wide, he still felt quite claustrophobic with being surrounded by the stone walls. This was the second time he had gone up and down this particular staircase, but he still had no clues which would help him shed light on the lack of naturalness of the staircase's structure when it came to the reason as to why it did not shoot out of the Tower despite being straight.

Subaru: "Why did you even consider doing such a stupid thing… I'm at my breaking point here…"

It went without saying just how tough it was to carry him on his back down the long staircase.

Especially since there were four-hundred-and-forty-four steps to this long staircase (as per Emilia's count). It was not like Subaru held any animosity towards Emilia for telling him that, but in times like these where the actual number of stairs kept popping into his head, he did feel an urge of wanting to pinch her cheeks and tell her off.

Of course, Emilia would definitely look cute if he tried to pinch her cheeks——

Subaru: "Both Emilia and Beako are gonna be worried… if I don't hurry up and get him back."

They had noticed Julius's absence in the Green Room, and they had all ended up going around the Watchtower to look for him. They had gone to the Third Floor as well as to the rooms on the Fourth Floor whilst they made Shaula go downstairs to check on Gian and the dragon carriage on the Ground Floor.

Everyone was worried about Julius. Worried about the feelings in his heart due to his defeat to Reid and having vanished leaving behind his broken Knight's sword.

For sure, they were all the types to worry themselves sick with that anxiety weighing on them.

Subaru: "But, you know…"

——Nevertheless, only Subaru differed from them. Only Subaru was able to immediately understand what lay in his heart.

Where had Julius gone without his Knight's sword, and for what purpose?

Only Subaru had known the answers to those questions for sure——

???: "——Everything is shaking about."

Subaru: "——Tch! Did you just notice!?"

Subaru stopped mid-step upon hearing the voice coming from his back. Julius, who was being carried by him on his shoulders, stirred at his voice and said "Ahh."

Julius: "Where are we…"

Subaru: "Vaguely speaking, we're halfway down some stairs, a bit more precisely speaking, we're halfway down a long staircase, and even more precisely, we're halfway fleeing down the staircase between the Second and Fourth Floors."

Julius: "You are being pretty vague about it, are you not… You are carrying me on your back?"

Subaru: "Yes, I am. And let me just say that this is the second time this has happened in this short period of time. I'm having to do this again thirty minutes after I'd thought I'd never like to do this again; do you get how I am feeling about this?"

Julius: "It is no wonder that the ride has been a bumpy one…"

Subaru: "Do you want me to throw you off?"

Subaru could sense Julius's wheezed laughter coming from his back. He ignored the sarcasm in his words and untensed himself a little.

In all honesty, Subaru had not gandered any predictions at what Julius's first words after waking up. He would not be exaggerating if he said that he had even been fearing what he would say, truthfully speaking.

That was why Subaru had been relieved that the sort of conversation he had gleaned from Julius's first couple of words after waking up had not been the despair-filled sort.

Subaru: "Do you remember what happened?"

Julius: "…Sad as it is, I do. I was easily defeated by our enemy, and in the end I was still shown sympathy, causing trouble for you, Anastasia-sama and everyone else."

Subaru: "…I'm not some kind of demon who'd blame you for losing against an opponent like that."

Julius sounded awfully like himself, and for that Subaru let out a sigh and started going down the staircase once more.

Having regained his consciousness, Julius was much easier to carry than before. He had also cleared up some of his anxieties which had been ladening his step, so thanks to that he could tackle the remaining steps with renewed vigor.

Julius: "…Anastasia-sama is out of harm's way, right? I saw that she collapsed and now that she is being treated in that Spirit's room."

Subaru: "The present diagnosis on her is that her life isn't in danger. You, on the other hand, were pretty close to dying. That guy… That eye-patched bastard, I'd be surprised if you knew who he is."

Julius: "——Reid Astrea."

Subaru: "————"

His voice was brimming with confidence in his response. Subaru was so surprised for a second that both his feet and breath caught in their tracks. However, he quickly brought both his feet and breath back into motion so to not let him onto his surprise.

Subaru carefully chose his words so that Julius would not sense his flustered state.

Subaru: “So, so you knew all along? That thing. Shaula said she knows him. Makes sense that she does because she seems acquainted with him from four-hundred years ago… But, it looks like she was telling the truth when she alluded that he’s someone that’s hard to deal with. I say that since she fainted right after she saw his face.”

Julius: “Huh, there were a ton of things which tipped me off. He has flaming red hair and blue eyes. His technique with the sword really stood out… If you can even call it a technique with the sword. He did not even let himself swing his sword against me. I should just simply say that he is a powerful person. Even the term «Stick Swinger» is one that denotes him, from what I have seen in literature.”

Subaru: “So he’s been called a Stick Swinger since olden times because he fights with those chopsticks!?”

Julius: “Actually, the nuance of it is that he did not choose a weapon he specialized with. I had my thoughts about him when he introduced himself as a Stick Swinger… But, I was unsure. I apologize for not mentioning them to you.”

Subaru had no reply for Julius’s apologetic words. Though he had stated that there had been tons of things which had tipped him off, Subaru thought it too much of a stretch for him.

Reid Astrea, the man who was known as the First Sword Saint, should have died four-hundred years ago.

Just because some of his features matched did not mean that one could easily come to the conclusion of having encountered that hero of yore whose name had gone down in fairytale and legend.

If there had been a chance that he could have noticed that, then he, Subaru, should have been able to come to that conclusion.

After all, he and Emilia had both agreed that the Examinations which had been put forward by this Watchtower were similar to the Trials they had taken at Echidna’s Tomb.

With that said, Subaru should have given more thought about the contents of the Examinations set out by this Tower and raised as many possibilities as he could.

Neglecting that had led to their routing on the Second Floor Electra.

Julius: “Hmm. How in the world did we end up coming across this swordsman of legend brought back from the past…? Originally, I would have been delighted in having been granted this boon, but all things considered…”

Subaru: “I get how you feel. These heroes of legend are all good at being disappointing in reality. This Watchtower is full of let downs, like with Shaula who’d been judged as a Sage.”

Julius: “…You get, how I feel…?”

His voice was cracked and it felt full of self-derision.

Subaru inconsiderately gritted his teeth upon hearing what Julius had moaned out from up-close. But he chose not to touch on that, opting instead to say, “Even so”.

Subaru: “If I’m recalling correctly, the First Sword Saint is engraved on gold coins, but there’s a pretty big difference between that and the actual guy. Shaula also differed in her gender, so even though we can’t do much about it, there’s a considerable gap between them two too. The guy on the gold coin looked more like a middle-aged dude…”

Julius: “Just a quick historical tidbit, it was when he was older that Reid accomplished his deeds that led him to be counted as one of the Three Great Heroes. The figure depicted on the gold coins is probably correct. The him up above is younger than the one from recorded history.”

Subaru: “Come to mention it, it didn’t seem that Reid recognized Shaula…”

He had planned to change the subject, but per chance they ended up touching on another issue.

Compared to what Julius had said, there had definitely been too much of a difference of hot and cold between the two of Reid and Shaula for there to have been some sort of friendship between them. If he assumed that “This guy was the Reid before he’d met Shaula”, then there would be some parts he could agree with regarding the two’s differences in recognizing each other.

But, when he took into consideration Shaula’s overreaction and the high likelihood that Reid had not remembered her name or face due to how he was, the basis of his hypothesis weakened.

Subaru: “If we take that as correct, doesn’t that mean that they would have fought against the Witch after their prime days? Meaning we’d have to beat Reid in his prime.”

Julius: “Feels to me like that is going to be either really though, or nigh-impossible.”

Subaru: “Yeah, for sure it’s gonna be an exhausting mess. But I’m sure that there’ll be some way of getting around this if we come up with a plan. As things stand…”

Subaru hesitated as he looked for anything that could help them against Reid.

Right now, at this moment, he should have told Julius what was weighing on his mind, but he had not because his heart had stopped him in his tracks.

Yet he had been a little too slow.

Julius: “As things stand… What do you mean?”

Subaru: “Ah, it’s nothing…”

Julius: “Subaru.”

If he made any excuses saying that he had observed Reid and noticed a chink in his armor, they would be immediately spotted by him. In actual fact, right now, nothing that would let them get past Reid had been found, nor had anything that looked like a weak point; that was for sure.

Thus Subaru resigned himself upon having his name curtly called out.

Subaru: “…Emilia passed the Examination after you and Anastasia lost consciousness.”

Julius: “————”

Subaru: “That’s all. The reason why she beat the guy down wasn’t due to her being stronger than him. Let’s just say that lady luck was at her side… Because Emilia is well, unique like that.”

It was a bit difficult to call the end result a mere victory.

Emilia had just barely had her resolve and ability recognized by their Examiner, Reid, in the Examination. However, the circumstances that had led to her achieving that were hard to explain to anyone who had not witnessed them.

Because, even if they tried to beat him in the same way, it would not be possible by anyone other than Emilia.

Subaru: “Anyways, as a result of having various complex stuff click into place for her, Emilia cleared the Examination. Despite that, the guy said that he’d only let those who cleared the Examination pass through, so all of us will have to beat him to go upstairs… Rather wicked of him.”

Julius: “————”

Subaru: “So we’ll need to work out a battle plan. Regardless of fighting dignity, I can’t even talk unless I force him to recognize the fighting duo that is me and Beatrice. And as for Meili, she has no reason to take the Examination in the first place. I guess she’ll understand after we talk about it… Though I guess she’ll be bummed out.”

Julius: “————”

Subaru: “That’s why, well, you too won’t be going in blind when we rematch him. I’m not stretching things here, I mean it. We won’t tackle him like we did this time around. We’ll work out a plan and mode of approach after we have a far clearer picture of him. This time one which is in my style…”

Julius: “————”

Subaru: “…Hey, are you listening? Hey, Julius?”

Subaru felt suspicious that Julius had yet to reply to any of his rapid-fire explanations. With Julius still being slung over his back, after he called out to him, Julius paused for a moment, and then said,

Julius: “Yeah, yeah, everything is fine. I am listening of course… I see, Emilia-sama managed it.”

Subaru: “Well I mentioned that slightly earlier… But yeah. That happening means clearing the Examination isn’t a futile hope. Aren’t you going too hard on yourself?”

Julius: “Too hard on myself? Huh, you really need not worry so much—— Everything is exactly as you say. If Emilia-sama has been able to pass the Examination then he is… Then the Sword Saint, Reid, is not an insurmountable obstacle. Us knowing that is incredibly beneficial.”

Subaru: “Y-yeah, right. That’s right… I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

Julius had unexpectedly accepted the fact that Emilia had passed the Examination rather flexibly. Subaru had nervously explained it to him, but he sensed that Julius was sidestepping his question from his reaction—— No, things were fine.

Julius had been informed that someone had cleared the obstacle he had slammed face-first into before him.

But it was pointless for Julius to worry himself sick over that. Subaru could say that he was taking a bit too much of a naive look at him. Or by his own measure, he guessed that he should not have leapt to conclusions about the Knight named Julius Juukulius.

As Subaru found himself embroiled by these profound feelings, Julius let out a long sigh and casually spoke out saying, “So then”,

Julius: “Is it not high time you put me down? I am going to get motion sickness if I keep staying on your back. It is not as if you possess the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion like ground dragons do, correct?”

Subaru: “Be patient with the breeze and all the swaying, and be grateful that I’m carrying you. It’s certainly tiring work, but I can’t be so coldhearted as to make you walk on your own when you’re injured. Emilia-tan would tell me off.”

Subaru shook his head at Julius’s proposal and jiggled his body, readjusting Julius on his back.

Julius was not in a good condition right now, at all. No matter how skilled the room’s Spirit was at its work and how much treatment Julius, whose whole body had been knocked about, had been able to receive, he had only spent a few dozen minutes in the Green Room.

That, and he had not been able to receive any treatment from his second defeat.

Were he suffering from injuries such as cuts or fractures, then Subaru could have put his skills into work with the first aid treatment techniques of the Clind variety; but, unfortunately, Julius held no such obvious wounds.

Reid's blows had been the kind that had been devised to tear through Julius's heart.

Of course, there did not seem to be any doubt that he had accumulated damage that was invisible on the surface, but that was no excuse to make him do anything that would exert him.

That's why Subaru had resolved to go down the whole staircase with Julius on his back, with half of it remaining, probably about two-hundred more steps; yet despite that——

Julius: "——No, I cannot keep causing you trouble. It would be fine if I were still fainted, but luckily I have regained my senses. I am able to go down the rest of the stairs by myself."

Subaru: "Don't be so ridiculously stubborn. It's too late for that, even if you insist. If you're saying you're embarrassed at being seen carried on my back, everyone who was with me already saw that… Only Shaula and Anastasia didn't on account of having fainted."

Julius: "Then that is the reason why. There is no way I can show myself like this to those two… Especially to Anastasia-sama. Put me down."

Subaru: "Don't say such forced things. To start with, you…"

Julius: "——I said put me down!"

——His outburst was quite abrupt.

Subaru: "Whoa!?"

Subaru's shoulder struck against the staircase wall straight after Julius's strained voice had thudded against his earlobe.

That was thanks to Julius twisting himself off his back by force. Subaru had immediately turned to face the wall so that he would keep himself safe, but it would not have been unlikely if he ended up nearly falling down the stairs.

However, he had avoided that fate thanks to his quick thinking——

Julius: "——Kh."

Subaru: "You… fucking idiot! What the hell were you thinking!?"

He leaned against the wall and when he turned around, he found Julius lying down a few stairs below him, having slid down after falling from Subaru's back.

Face down on the ground, supporting himself up on his elbows, wheezing in pain with a deep look of agony about him. Clearly not only from falling down the stairs.

Subaru: "I told you to quit it! HEY, stay right there, you dumbass. I'm coming over to you…"

Julius: "You do not need to!"

Subaru: "————"

Julius: "…I can stand by myself. I do not need you to aid me."

He tried to run down to him as quickly as he could, but halted.

Julius had stretched out his hand in front of him, as he propped himself up against the floor and stopped him from running over. Panting heavily still, he scrunched his face and managed to raise his body up.

He leaned against the wall and slowly lifted his lower back, stretched his knees and stood up, though still using the wall to prop himself up.

Julius: "See, did I not tell you so? That it would be easy for me to stand by myself."

Subaru was at a loss for words at what Julius had said, who in some respects sounded like he was casting everything aside.

Julius turned himself around and, with the right side of his body pressed up against the wall, began to slowly climb down the stairs at a speed similar to that of a baby crawling along the floor.

One step at a time, as if he was forcing himself——

Julius: “It looks like it shall take me a bit more time, but this way I will not cause you any trouble. More importantly, the girls downstairs should be worried. I am grateful that you seem to be looking past that which I have done, but it was not just you who went out looking for where I was, right?”

Slowly, step-by-step.

Julius: “…If possible, would you be able to go downstairs before me and explain them what happened? Though I think it is probably best you leave the full story and the apologizing to me. You are only required to tell them that you found me, and try to make them feel less worried.”

Slowly, slowly, one step at a time.

Julius: “…I admit that apologizing is going to be plenty depressing, but avoiding that is a road I cannot walk down. After you calm the waters down, even if only a little, I shall really owe you a huge debt of gratitude. You know, you may even want to think about adding that to the debt I owe you.”

Julius continued to speak without looking over at him as he tried to make his way down the stairs by himself. Indeed, a gap had started to form between him and the immobile Subaru despite how slow he was going about it.

He could close the distance between them immediately if he so desired. If he were to grant his wish, he still needed to walk past him once—— So Subaru set his feet into motion.

Subaru: “I guess I should speak to Emilia’s side first.”

Julius: “…Yeah, oh, that is correct, if Anastasia-sama’s woken up… Ah wait, no, let’s not. Anyways, I would like to depend on you.”

Subaru hurried down the stairs and easily caught up to Julius. He let out a sigh that resembled one of relief as he heard Subaru’s footsteps echoing around the staircase and encouraged him to vamoose off ahead.

——No, not “vamoose off ahead”. More like he had encouraged him to “not wait up on me”.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru could understand a little about what lay in Julius’s innermost thoughts, with what he had stated.

The justification to that capacity of his, was the same one as to why only he, and no one else, had immediately gotten the hunch that Julius had gone to challenge Reid——

There was unmistakably something in common between that which Subaru had felt back then, and this somewhat similar incident. That was why, back then, Subaru had——

Subaru: "——Tch! Goddamn this! Damnthisdamnthisdamnthis! Dumbass! We're both huge dumbasses! For fuck's sake!"

Subaru spat out his frustrations, kicked the staircase and then made his way towards Julius.

He was not going to walk past him, who was now flustered as he leaned against the wall; instead he grabbed his left arm and propped him up by unceremoniously draping his arm over his shoulder.

Julius: "Hey… Subaru, what are you…"

Subaru: "Shut up! What are you doing, standing up by yourself! It's plain as day that you're struggling to stand up straight! Like I'd ever be able to let myself prance off and leave a guy in your state here! I'd be first in line to say just how disgusted I am at myself before Emilia even has a chance to tell me off!"

Julius: "But I am…"

Subaru: "This is me we're talking about, I wouldn't lend you a hand if you didn't really need one. Even under normal circumstances, my hands are always filled with this, that and the other. If you seriously don't want to borrow my strength, then quit hobbling about so miserably, it's really trying my patience!"

Julius: "————"

Julius remained silent as Subaru shouted at him with spittle flying out from his mouth.

As soon as Subaru saw that Julius hesitated in going against him and that, for now, the latter had lost the strength to shake him off as he had been doing, he started to walk again, whilst still lending his shoulder to Julius. Whether he liked it or not.

Julius had no time to go against him, now that he had set the pace like that.

Subaru: "I'm not going to act like I know or understand what's going through your heart."

Julius: “————”

Subaru: “But, right now, you needn’t walk down these stairs, these long-ass stairs alone, all by yourself. I will lend you my shoulder and I won’t think of it as a debt either.”

Talking about lending, borrowing and debts was ridiculous.

If he put it like that, then how much did he owe Julius?

Surely his first debt to him would have started in the Training Ground at the Royal Castle.

——He knew the reason why Julius had challenged Reid, even though he knew victory was not reachable.

He had… he had acted the same as Subaru back then.

Back then, Subaru had challenged Julius even though he was aware a win was unattainable. No matter how many times he had been knocked down, no matter how many times he had been struck, he had picked himself up without learning his lesson and kept challenging him.

Because, back then, he had no other way to hurl out the tempestuous emotions that had built up inside his heart than that.

And, back then, Subaru had ended up “alone”, at a place where everything had ended for him, at a place where he had argued with Emilia and where she had bid him her goodbyes. That had been agonizing. That had made him want to cry.

——So how could he leave Julius all alone on this staircase.

Subaru: “————”

His heart must be set ablaze. Just like him back then.

But unlike him, he still did not know where he could hurl out his tempestuous emotions.

Julius: “——Subaru.”

Subaru: “What is it.”

Julius: “…I am sorry.”

Subaru: “Shut up.”

He replied with that, hoping that he would not perceive it as a fit of anger.

And like that, the two of them slowly climbed down the stairs, and made it back to the Fourth Floor.

——Emilia found them a little over ten minutes later, clasping her chest in relief.

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by DdukaE (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 30 – The Second Floor's Capture Strategy Post-Mortem

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 6 "Recommendations for Living Together in a Tower", Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Hedge, DiscountAnon/Nanashi-tan) — Complete

——A woman, a sole woman existed.

She worried about people, about conflict, about the world, about absolutely everything.

To the woman, everything appeared miniscule. To her, everything, everyone, was a child who needed protection.

Such a fragile world, with such fragile people, would be so easy to subjugate with a display of her abilities.

But the woman sought to brandish her arms not to control this world. Instead, she sought to shelter it from harm.

And thus, the woman's lonesome struggle commenced. The trial and error that followed, for the woman, was not facile.

Showing people the way, bringing people together, lending people a helping hand, giving people advice.

All this was beyond the reach of a single woman. Her hand could not grasp it. What needed to be done, was unattainable.

For the first time, the woman cursed the scarcity of her own power.

Even if she saw distress, she was short on helping hands. Even if she came across a predicament, she could do nothing to give relief. Because, of that lack of ability.

She could reach what laid in front of her, but she could not cross an impossible distance. Even if she could see through everything, happenings past could not be amended. There was no life to deal with the faraway calamity.

The power she believed in, was present. That was not nearly enough for her wish to pass.

The wisdom she was proud of, was present. That was not good enough for the path towards her wish to be made apparent.

And thus, the woman fell into despair. The malediction of her own lack of ability was realized over and over again.

With the lamentations of others tearing her up to infinity, all kinds of remorse struck her.

Finally, the woman understood. She could not. There was no way. It was impossible.

This exorbitant, lofty wish was unattainable, especially for one lonesome woman.

She knew. She realized. She understood. Her wish was impossible—— But, even so, she would not forfeit.

If one person was not enough, then that number would be increased. Simply by not being alone, by finding others who shared her desire, the unfulfilled wish would be grasped by their hands.

Her mind felt cleansed. The once hazy path had finally become clear.

Her wish could finally address those inexorable laments, those unsalvagable tragedies, that repeated cruelty.

She joined forces with the Instigator, bequeathed the battlefield to the Heavenly Sword, made a deal with the Dragon, and pushed onward towards her greatest wish.

The fulfillment of her utmost wish, would eventually be attained.

The terminus of her vow, should finally be reached.

The denouement of her great wish, would, without fail, eventually, finally, arrive——

Woman: "Save. Saved. The way to save them, I can see it—— The path to salvation."

No matter how much hurt laid ahead in this process, even if she lost herself, abandonment must simply be abandoned.

Even if her Instigator were to disappear, even if her Heavenly Sword's smiles were to vanish forever, even if her Dragon were to levant to faraway skies, she could not surrender.

Even if her first allies left her side, her footsteps would not cease. For the once-lonesome woman was no longer alone.

Woman: "It has to be there. I know it is there—— I must know."

She treaded a road paved with countless corpses. Designating a multitude of lives as sacrifices, she moved towards grasping her greatest aspiration.

One day, her hands would be capable of reaching each and every tear. At such a moment, the world would be understood.

For the first time, the origin of her wish was close enough to grasp.

So, with that desperate wish, bearing excruciating despair, the woman struggled.

The Witch of Greed bled her own avarice, herself aflame for her unfulfilled wish.

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???: "——Julius has to properly rest here, until all of his wounds heal! This is the most absolute of the most absolute!"

Practically throwing a very worn-down Julius into the Green Room, Emilia scolded him.

She had gone to meet them, heaving a sigh of relief upon seeing Subaru with Julius supported by his shoulder, as they came down the long stairs connecting the Second Floor Electra and the Fourth Floor.

To be able to switch between emotions quickly was indeed a virtue, and they were thankful she did not pry into the matter further. It was a clever move, as there was no reason to prepare an excuse if one did not ask for reasons. Even if, in truth, Emilia had a mountain of things to ask Julius——

Emilia: "——Even if I don't, I'm sure Subaru has said what needed to be said. So, I'm going to have you rest properly, and everything can come after. Right?"

Subaru: "…Ah—— Yeah, pretty much. There's nothing I can say against that, and I don't plan on going against Emilia-tan's opinions. Get some sleep."

Subaru put Julius down on a bed of ivy near the entrance of the Green Room. Beside him, both hands on her waist, Emilia proudly puffed air through her nostrils. That too was a cute gesture.

After hearing what the two had to say, Julius brushed over his bangs and sighed.

Julius: "Naturally. I am already but putting a burden on you and Emilia-sama. Even after all this, I can no longer act with such shamelessness. I shall obey."

Subaru: "Man, just a simple «got it» would be enough here…"

Emilia: "That's right! There's no need for that formality stuff. Julius is the one who's injured, so it's just a matter of you staying put until your injuries are healed! It's completely fine to be a burden. We're friends, after all."

Julius: "————"

Emilia: "Patrasche, I'm leaving Julius in your care. If there's anything wrong, just cry out loud. We'll come running, okay?"

Slashing away Julius's roundabout way of showing gratitude, Emilia called out to the corner of the room, beyond the ashamed Julius—— where Patrasche was healing her own wounds.

The headcount of the Green Room increased to three people and one animal—— The unconscious duo of Rem and Anastasia, and the wounded duo of Julius and Patrasche. Because the Green Room had a limit on how many people could remain present at a time, Subaru and Emilia could not remain to keep an eye on them.

Thus, it was better for one of the injured members to keep an eye on everyone else. Normally, that job would go to Julius, however.

Julius: "To have Emilia-sama insist this much, I shall lose face. I will quietly do as told."

Subaru: "Its kinda tough to get back trust once you've lost it. So in that respect, it's kinda hard to get past Patrasche, who's always kinda scoring full points for trust. If there's any funny business going on, it's fine to not hold back and bite him, Patrasche."

Patrasche: "————"

She snorted as a sign of accepting Subaru and Emilia's words—— or at least, it could be taken as such.

The best girl of the Emilia Camp, their own "Understanding Lady", Patrasche, seemed to feel a sort of responsibility towards Julius for letting him leave alone just now.

Her eyes shone with a strong will, as if to say that there would not be a next time.

Subaru: "Look, look. Even Patrasche is going «Thou shall not pass the next time»[98]."

Emilia: "You know what, it's very strange but you're right. She does look like she's saying that."

Subaru: "But, according to our bilingual Warrior-Grade Internal Affairs Minister, more or less, the nuance is right. But, since she's a lady, she might end her sentences with a *desu wa*[99], you know?"

Sometimes, whenever Otto translated for her using his Divine Protection of the Soul of Language, Subaru almost always found Patrasche's high level of tolerance towards his actions to be astonishing. Recently, he felt that even without Otto's presence, the two could communicate what was on their minds. But whenever that fact was brought up, Patrasche would beat him with her tail. Indeed, the mind of a woman was complex. In any case,

[98] A bit of a localization. Original phrase is "次は絶対にうぬを逃がさぬ", or, "I absolutely won't let you go next time".

[99] "ですわ", romanized as above, is a polite form of "です" (desu), used more often by women. Both are equivalent to the English word "is". There's no way to localize this, so it's still in Japanese.

Julius: "I will quietly devote myself to having my wounds heal at this place. Recuperating while being surrounded by such beautiful girls in a serene environment is a luxury one can rarely afford, after all."

Subaru: "I'll let you know beforehand, all the girls here except for Anastasia belong to me."

Subaru pointed out, starting with the bedridden Rem, then Patrasche, then to Emilia who was right beside him, in a retort to Julius's impudent statement.

Upon hearing that, Emilia's cheeks puffed up and,

Emilia: "I'm not Subaru's yet… But I did give it some thought, and since Subaru is my Knight, wouldn't that just make him mine?"

Subaru: "That makes me really happy, but also really embarrassed!"

Emilia put her finger to her lips while Subaru gave a celebratory dance, the latter overwhelmed by the bold remarks he had just heard, but after all that, he looked back towards Julius.

It would take time for him to overcome his anguish. But, at the very least, he ought to have the heart to take the first step up that long hill.

Subaru: "Well, anyhow, while you're resting, you might wanna hold your head and roll around while thinking over the stuff that just happened, but don't forget that Patrasche's watching."

Julius: "You may be at ease. I will not display such shamelessness—— It would be very inelegant of me."

Subaru: "…Feels like you're already getting better."

Julius: "Hm."

With the answer being very like him, Subaru's cheeks loosened with a soft smile.

He bore two defeats, where he could not accomplish a single thing.

That fact should have brought him intolerable humiliation and helplessness, but he seemed to have surpassed that first wave of emotions.

Subaru felt glad that he had not been left alone on that long stairway.

If it could give him even the tiniest bit of salvation, it would mean that Subaru had truly learnt something from his time of being publicly humiliated at the Royal Castle back then.

Subaru: "——Patrasche, I'll leave this in your hands."

At the very end, Subaru gave his beloved dragon a reminder, before both he and Emilia exited the Green Room.

Upon their departure, Patrasche got up and took a seat nearer to Julius, in a position to better keep him under her watch. Seeing that, Julius put on a bitter smile.

Indeed, Patrasche was a wise dragon, faithful to her instructions.

Considering her spirit, and Julius's mental condition in mind, it was safe to assume that the members of the Green Room would be okay.

Emilia: "…Should I freeze the door just in case?"

Subaru: "I'm always pretty amazed by Emilia-tan's boundless imagination, but let's leave that as a last resort thing, yeah? Don't wanna anger the Spirit in that room either."

Emilia: "Mhm, you're right. Fufu, I just wanted to see what you'd say. I was just joking."

Cutely sticking out her tongue, Emilia apologized. Seeing that, Subaru pursed his lips, deciding not to tell her that he'll keep that as a possible option.

——Worst-case scenario, he would consider blocking any action via brute force.

In that case, the best person to stop Julius would still be Emilia, speaking both from her position, and from a power perspective. Fortunately, because Julius's mental state was stabilizing, Subaru felt relieved that there was no need to take such measures.

Subaru: "Anyhow, let's leave the matters of the Green Room to its resident Spirit. From what I saw, Patrasche's wounds seemed to be healing really nicely, so Julius will get back up soon too."

Emilia: "Un, that's right. Julius's injuries… They weren't as bad as they looked. I think he'll be back to full health in no time. Reid made it like that, I guess."

Subaru: "…Good at going easy, huh. Can't really let Julius hear that stuff, eh."

Subaru agreed to how Emilia worded her guess while scratching his head.

While having absolute mastery over chopsticks sounded like a bad joke, to be able to play around with someone strong as Julius like he was a baby, Reid's battle prowess needed no explanation.

The First Generation Sword Saint, the man who defeated the Witch of Envy alongside the Sage and the Dragon—— In the face of such a legendary man, one had no choice but to nod their heads and accept things as they were.

But whether his personality was befitting someone bearing the title of Legendary Hero, was a different matter entirely.

Subaru: "For now, our first topic would be…"

???: "——To find a way to clear that pesky Second Examination or whatever, before the wounds of that Knight Julius heal, correct?"

Subaru: "————"

A cold voice cut into Subaru and Emilia's conversation. Ram, standing with her back leaning against the wall of the hallway, having been waiting for them to return.

Caught out by the limitations of the number of people in the Green Room, Ram had been waiting in the hall. Having his innermost concerns spilled by her, Subaru rubbed his cheeks.

Subaru: "Is my face really of the variety that gives away everything I'm thinking so accurately?"

Ram: "I just put together whatever worries were on your face. The things Barusu would be worried about right now all lay inside of that room. That is all there is to it."

Subaru: "Hell, that's not even close. I'm worried about everyone, obviously including Emilia-tan and Beako, but I'm also concerned about you, nee-sama. It's not limited to the people occupying that room."

Ram: "Hah!"

Ram ridiculed Subaru's thumbs-up with a snort.

Subaru looked on with a sulky appearance, lips pursed in a pout, as Ram began walking away with her back to him. Emilia covered her mouth as she giggled right beside him and,

Emilia: "It's okay. Ram just got a little flustered. She's just not really honest."

Subaru: "I feel like you're really biased here, but if Emilia-tan says it, well."

Watching her from the side, Subaru turned and cracked his neck, before chasing after Ram. Ram was headed towards one of the smaller rooms of the Fourth Floor. Upon stepping inside that room,

???: "…You're late, I suppose. Kept us waiting for too long, in fact. Julius is doing fine, I suppose?"

The voice that welcomed them was that of Beatrice, coming from the dead center of the room, where she was sitting. Looking straight up at Subaru and Emilia, she showered light abuse, with a bit of a worry for Julius mixed in. Subaru bitterly smiled at that dishonest attitude of hers.

Subaru: "Don't worry. Seems that worst is past him for now. He's got a pointlessly strong sense of responsibility, so he'll be reflecting on what he did, I'm sure… Well, he won't be causing any problems anytime soon."

Beatrice: "If Subaru says so, it should be fine to take those words at face value, in fact. That way, our problems can be narrowed down to just one, I suppose."

After discerning Julius's condition, Beatrice pulled in her chin. Nodding at her words, Subaru moved his eyes over the room.

The small room was one of many on the Fourth Floor of the Watchtower, and it was also the one that contained all the luggage of Subaru and the others' Watchtower Capture Group. In that room, they all sat down in a circle, with Subaru and Beatrice facing Emilia and Ram respectively. With that——

Subaru: "I need you to tell me more about that bastard, Shaula."

Shaula: "Uhii, Master's looking really scary! Butbut, I don't hate it when he's tough on me like that either. It's a love-hate thing."

Ram: "As she says, Master. Disgusting."

Subaru: "I object!"

Wrapping her arms around her voluptuously feminine body, Shaula squirmed with Meili sat atop her lap. Ram took her crazy behavior too literally, but to Subaru, those false charges were too much to take. Anyway,

Subaru: "First of all, I'd like to thank everyone for helping with looking for Julius. Even if he were told not to, the guy will likely come around later to apologize himself, so for now, he's fine."

Emilia: "It's fine. I said that to Julius too, but I'm just glad we found him safe and sound. I'm sure everyone else feels the same way, right?"

Ram: "I would prefer to not have my opinion be the same as Emilia-sama's."

Subaru: "Eh!? Say what now!?"

Subaru had attempted to lead the conversation forward, but it quickly seemed that there was a difference of opinion between Ram and Emilia.

Ram pointed a finger towards a surprised Emilia and started,

Ram: "Please listen carefully. As far as I have been reported, the Second Examination needs to be overcome by everyone present in the Tower. And yet, Knight Julius took matters into his own hands without consulting any of us and made a second attempt by himself… If there was a single misstep here, it could have broken down the cooperative relationship we have built between the Anastasia-sama's faction and ours."

Emilia: "Because, from Julius's actions alone, all of us could've been disqualified?"

Ram: "If that were the case, our entire journey would have been for nothing. It is also uncertain whether the Examiner of the Second Floor would even let us go safely… That includes that fake Sage over there."

Ram's eyes took a glance at Shaula while she was explaining everything to Emilia. Perhaps she had not considered that she would be a topic of conversation, so she pointed to herself and asked,

Shaula: "Me? Does fake Sage mean me? That's really unthinkable, calling me that! I've never called myself a Sage! The only name I give is the only one Master gave me, and that's Shaula! I'm devoted to my one and only Master!"

Ram: "Disgusting."

Subaru: "Stop looking at me and saying that! …I won't deny what you're saying."

Putting the excessive things aside, considering what could be the worst-case scenario, Ram's assumptions could not be put to rest. Julius's actions had put everyone at risk.

Even if he had not completely grasped the gist of the Second Examination—— Or rather, because he had a complete understanding of the situation, that his actions were even more careless.

Ram: "That it was unlike the Knight Julius, is something I, who barely knows the man, cannot say. But, taking even Gluttony into account, I thought of him as a person who would not do such things."

Subaru: "Well, I do agree with that… But my line of thinking's a bit different than that, since I know the guy. I chalk it up to being manly measles."

Ram: "Measles?"

Subaru: "Should I have said chicken pox instead?"

Ram: "————"

In any case, it had the nuance of "a disease everyone had caught at least once in their lives".

As such, measles or chickenpox could easily be compared with Julius's actions and would be easier to digest, but catching either in adulthood could have serious consequences. Especially as it could be fatal.

Subaru: "That it wasn't fatal this time… Let's just be happy with that and let him off."

Ram: "——I just do not want to be pulled back by others."

Ram looked away from Subaru and whispered, her voice low.

Seeing her cheeks stiffen, Subaru raised his eyebrows.

Beatrice: "It seems that the elder of the sisters hasn't been feeling too well ever since she came to the Tower, in fact. Maybe the fatigue of a long journey has finally caught up to her, or maybe the horn therapy is not working as well for her, I suppose."

Subaru: "Or maybe, there's something else that's bothering her… Heck, that's probably it."

Sitting right next to him with hands held, Subaru and Beatrice whispered to one another.

To take out her frustrations of Julius's actions and irritation of being unable to see a way to clear the Examinations on Subaru and Shaula, was very far from Ram's usual behavior.

It was likely that the source of that frustration came from looking at the method of saving Rem in the face, yet being unable to reach for it.

Of course, it would be wrong to say that the fatigue or the injured horns pointed out by Beatrice were unrelated to that.

Both mind and body were unwell. All of those were the likely factors working behind Ram's outburst.

???: "Weeell~, do you guys just wanna fight heeere~? Or would you guys want to get the chat moooving~? If you don't decide soon, I'm not gonna be taking part, ya knooow~."

In an instant, Meili put a stop on the worsening condition of the place.

Snuggling beside Shaula, fingers playing with her braids, she lazily scanned everyone present in the room,

Meili: "Please stop fighting if you can, kaaay~? I don't like it, getting hurt or being afraaaid~."

Subaru: "You… No, you're right. That bystander position of yours saves us a lot."

Meili: "Is that sooo~? Ufufu, then please be grateful, kaaay~?"

In the face of his gratitude, Meili smiled innocently like the young girl she was. However, that smile of hers also had a bewitching allure to it, subtly describing her dangerous nature.

Even in the face of that smile, Subaru offered his gratitude to her. Thinking back, it had been Meili who had suggested retreating from the Examination from before, as well.

Having someone as a companion who was able to tell when to retreat depending on the situation was a big plus.

Subaru: "Keep it up, alright? It's important to look at things with composure."

Meili: "You're really feeling good, huuuh~. Even if you say things like that, my job's done when we get out of the sand sea, riiight~? I'm not good for anything else anywaaay~."

Subaru: "Not how I see it, though? Having more heads thinking helps a lot, and combined with us getting out of the sand sea alive, while in the Tower, we all gotta share our lot with each other. Just think that you're outta luck and get depended on by me."

Meili: "————"

She was taken aback by Subaru's outright declaration of leaning on her. Meili let out a long sigh and,

Meili: "…I'm starting to get why Petra-chan doesn't feel at ease with yooou~."

Subaru: "——? Petra what now?"

Meili: "It's nooothing~. That aside, don't you wanna ask the naked onee-san some stuuuff~?"

Turning her face away, Meili stood up and began shoving Shaula's back. Probably not because of the strength of her tiny arms, Shaula cheerfully came forward and took a seat right in front of Subaru, sitting on her knee, and slightly bowed down her head.

Shaula: "I may be slightly inexperienced, but I leave myself in your care."

Subaru: "That's a very admirable attitude you have there. Well, now moving on to the matter of wedding gifts… Ouch, ouch, ouch! Emilia-tan!? Beako!? Why are you two pinching both of my sides!?"

Emilia: "No reason."

Beatrice: "It's nothing, in fact."

Even if they said there was no reason to it, they both wanted to do something more than just pinch his sides, but hesitated to escalate things further.

Anyhow, Subaru coughed to get everything back on track, then approached Shaula again.

Subaru: "The guy from above is unmistakably Reid Astrea. The man himself admitted it so. So, I ask you, a living witness from that time, to enlighten us. What kind of guy was he?"

Shaula: "Human trash."

Subaru: "I heard you the first time, and heck, I even saw it in action."

Twisting her lips, she displayed an expression unbecoming of a lady as beautiful as her as she reminisced about the dead. Putting aside that that same deceased person was present in the same building, just some floors above, the memories she had of him seemed to be unpleasant, definitely.

Well, she had fainted at the very sight of him, mouth bubbling and all. So that came as no surprise.

Subaru: "We gotta get past him, no matter what. I'd love to get even a single hint on how to get past the Second Floor's Examination."

Ram: "So please tell us anything and everything about him. The Sword Saint Reid's personality, habits, relationships, likes, dislikes, weaknesses. Correct, we want to know his weakness. Talk."

Shaula: "Woah, you're coming onto me really fast! If I knew what his weakness was, I'd be stabbing back at him! In other words, he doesn't have a weakness!"

Ram: "Tch, useless."

Shaula: "You little girl, acting like you're hotter stuff than Master…"

Maybe she did have pride as a Sage, but she seemed to take offense to Ram's high-and-mighty attitude. However, she shrugged at Ram's glare, moving herself behind Subaru to use him as a shield.

Subaru: "The hell you doing, hiding? You're definitely stronger than her."

Shaula: "It's not about who's strong or who's weak. Somehow, my instincts are telling me to do this. Maybe, it's Master who's scared. That scared feeling's getting to me, because we're one mind, one body."

Subaru: "Don't you blame your lack of nerves on me."

Unable to compose himself due to the feeling of something soft press against his back, Subaru grabbed Shaula's neck and pulled her unwilling body back to its original position.

And thus, the Q&A session would resume——,

Emilia: "Hmm… In the end, Shaula doesn't know much about the Examination, right?"

Shaula: "It's not that I don't know. I just know it's not time to tell everything yet. I think everything's gonna be revealed when the mystery of the Tower is solved."

Emilia: "Is that how it is… I feel reaaally excited."

Subaru: "Don't play around with the naive Emilia-tan."

Ram: "Even if you do not know the Sword Saint's weaknesses, he has habits, right? If he has a fighting pattern, for example, we might be able to come up with a way to fight against it."

Shaula: "Habits, huh. Ah, that's right, whenever I tried to kill him for sexual harassment, he had the nerve to scratch his ass while defending himself! Isn't that a pattern?"

Subaru: "He was just making fun of you…"

Beatrice: "In the first place, the condition for clearing the Examination is vague, I suppose. There is no doubt Emilia was acknowledged, there must be another condition… The fulfilment of which gains acknowledgement as well, in fact."

Shaula: "I think he's weak to pretty girls. I guess if a pretty girl passes by, it might help."

Subaru: "That means, Julius and I'll have to be left behind, huh… That's a pretty tough condition."

Beatrice: "S-Subaru might be able to get by, if he tries his best, like by blinding him, definitely, that way, I think he might maybe really get through, I suppose…!"

Subaru: "You're so damn cute, you."

And, amidst the many unnecessary and unhelpful questions and answers, with Beatrice managing to keep Subaru away from being wounded, he caught her in a hug and was presently patting her head.

Whilst in his arms, letting herself be spoiled by him,

Beatrice: "In any case, Emilia just happened to succeed, in fact. A simple coincidence. That man just happened to let his guard down, and she just happened to be able to hit him, I suppose."

Subaru: "And how do you suppose that happened?"

Beatrice: "If Emilia was looking to kill, that man would have not gotten hit, in fact. Thus, it was that man's carelessness, which led to Emilia's victory, I suppose."

Emilia: "Huh? Just now, was I praised?"

Beatrice: "I did praise you, in fact."

Emilia: "Ah, just like I thought. Fufu, thank you. It makes me reaaally happy."

Emilia rejoiced at Beatrice's compliment, and began stroking her head too while Subaru was already doing so.

It was a rather messed-up situation, but still there was something to laugh and be happy about.

Subaru: "Man, anyway, it's pretty cool to think that his ability to counter depends on the amount of intent to kill. The reality of it is like that, huh. How serious you are about it."

Ram: "…You should put it the other way around. Just as Barusu says, if you do not understand how serious an enemy is, it is best to not let them get serious."

Subaru: "You shouldn't make them get serious?"

Picking up on her mutterings, Subaru frowned at Ram. Upon questioning her, she fell into deep thought for a while before answering with a "That is correct",

Ram: "Emilia-sama was acknowledged because she forced concession out of the Examiner and then met his conditions… The conditions for clearing this Examination are quite fickle, aren't they."

Subaru: "I feel the same about the fuzzy details of the conditions. They reflect the Examiner's disposition pretty well."

Ram: "That is why, I believe it is best to entertain the Examiner, and while doing so, present conditions which could be used for the Examination. On top of that, one has to defeat the Examiner to advance to the Second Floor."

Subaru: "————"

Taking in Ram's words, Subaru felt he understood it a bit better.

Emilia had proposed the condition that he would not move a single step, then through a hefty load of effort coupled with a tiny sprinkle of luck, she had grasped victory—— factoring in Reid's carelessness, it was a victory with the loosest of conditions. To gain victory through physical prowess, should be considered impossible after this.

Subaru: "Even if I go with that, it's not like he'd agree to fight me in a match of rock-paper-scissors, huh…"

Emilia: "Umm, so we've got to find a condition that'll convince Reid to accept them, and then do our best… Just as I thought, this Examination is a difficult exam that needs to be given some thought."

Subaru: "Rather than being difficult, I'd say this is a different kind of harassment compared to the Third Floor's."

The first was a test of wisdom (of knowledge not found in this world), and now came what was thought to be a test of power (on the level of the world's strongest), but there must be something else that was the main topic of this Examination.

In other words, while the Second Floor's Examination was different from the Third Floor's, it was an indisputable fact that the nature of these two Examinations showed the depth of the wickedness of the Watchtower's creator, the elusive Sage.

Next up——

Shaula: "——Isn't it fine this way? Just take it easy. No need to be going in such a hurry."

Subaru: "Slowly, you say."

Shaula looked over everyone busy with their own thoughts, then while sitting cross-legged, leaning left to right, she spoke in a casual way. In response, Subaru and others frowned at her, but she took it all in stride while indulging in the fun feeling that showed on her sparkling eyes,

Shaula: "I'm hoping Master and everyone else just stays here for ever and ever and eveeer~. I've been waiting for Master to come back home for hundreds of years, so."

Subaru: "That's…"

Shaula: "You guys can take as long as you want, as long as you like, to clear the Examinations. I'll be watching over you always—— No matter how many days, years, or even hundreds of years it takes."

Those were words that could not be laughed away, because of the weight they carried.

In that light tone and soft smile, she gave to everyone—— No, to Subaru alone, for whom she bore a heavy, heavy love, the weight of hundreds of years.

The weight of being told by the Sage to live in the Watchtower, and to protect it.

Shaula had said.

It was forbidden to leave the Tower without finishing the Examinations. And if that were violated, then she would display no mercy, even if it were her beloved Master, even if it were the current target of her affections, Subaru.

Even if words of love were proclaimed, even if an amicable relationship were maintained, that did not mean they would be allies.

The Star-Keeper of the Pleiades Watchtower, Shaula, was yet but another——

Shaula: "——It's fine to just stay here and have fun with me!"

——As one realized from her smile, obstacle for the ones who wished to clear the Examinations.

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by Norvak (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 31 – An Encouragement of Cooperation in the Tower

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 6 “Recommendations for Living Together in a Tower”, Parts 2-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Hedge) — Complete

——In the end, the conclusion of the Second Floor Electra Capture Meeting was put on hold.

Although they had failed to come up with an idea that would allow everyone to break through their current situation, the biggest factor in their decision to postpone everything was but one—— Subaru’s stomach had begun growling.

Subaru: “Looking back, I was unconscious for two entire days before I got up, and immediately got to tackling the Tower’s Examinations… No wonder my stomach was almost touching my back.”

It was only when the conversation died down that Subaru’s stomach roared, and for the first time did he realize exactly how famished he was.

To be unable to fight on an empty stomach was not actually true, but what was true was that it affected one’s ability to think properly. As a result, once Subaru’s stomach started growling to make its dissatisfaction known, everyone took it as a chance to sum up their discussions for the time being.

Subaru: “Honestly, some part of me feels rescued because my stomach made a noise…”

Leaving aside the breakthrough plan for the Second Floor, there was a certain pattern observed in the questions proposed by the Examinations of the Watchtower.

Alongside the realization of the pettiness of the Examiner, the exact nature of the danger Shaula posed also came to light—— Subaru was supposed to be wary of her because of her fighting prowess to begin

with, but because of her air-headedness, and her massive clinginess towards him, had made him put his guard down.

Shaula: *"——It's fine to just stay here and have fun with me!"*

No matter how many days, years, or even hundreds of years——

Indeed, Shaula's audacious declaration had reminded everyone of exactly what danger she posed. As it likely should be.

Subaru: "It's not like I'm planning on it or anything, but if we make a break for it in the middle of our Tower conquest, it seems like there's a rule that'll make her definitely become our enemy, right…"

Sifting through his mind, he recalled one of the many rules Shaula had spoken of.

Dropping out in the middle of the Examination, violating any of the Examination's rules, disrespecting the Library, and destroying the Tower. If any of these were to be broken, then Shaula would once more become the enemy she had been when preventing them from entering the Watchtower.

He wished to avoid that. Be it in terms of ability to fulfill their goal, or simply on an emotional level.

Subaru: "But, you know. Just sticking around here for years on end like how Shaula put it doesn't seem really realistic, so I'd really like a pass on that but…"

Regarding the topic of the Tower conquest soberly, many different kinds of anxieties would naturally rear their ugly heads.

Subaru and the gang had already spent over a month on their path to get to Pleiades Watchtower. Even if they cleared the Examinations one after another without a hitch and conquered the Tower, and then took that same amount of time to get back to Pristella, their journey would have lasted around three months.

Of course, withdrawing halfway was, because it would make Shaula an enemy, an undesirable decision to come to, but the Royal Selection deadline needed to be kept in consideration as Emilia and Anastasia were participants.

Three years in total—— A bit over one year had already passed, leaving only less than two years at hand.

Of course, the time that could be accumulated and the time that could be spent, were in fact both impossibly limited.

Beatrice: “But if you keep worrying about tomorrow’s tomorrow, you won’t get anywhere, in fact. For now, the tomorrow that is based on today is important, I suppose. For that…”

Subaru: “I gotta eat till I’m full now. Right.”

Beatrice: “That is so, in fact.”

Beatrice pointed her finger at Subaru as he spoke those words.

As the discussions were halted in lieu of preparing their meals, Subaru took this chance to go and stroll through the various parts of the Tower—— spending his free time wandering through the Fourth Floor, the area everyone designated as their residential quarters.

And accompanying him, holding his hand as tightly as she could, was Beatrice.

The reason they held hands every now and then was because Subaru’s Gate was busted, and as his contracted Spirit, Beatrice collected his pent-up Mana. But even putting that reason aside, Subaru wanted to hold Beatrice’s hand, and Beatrice herself never refused.

Subaru: “Besides, you were really worried about me when I was out cold for two whole days, right? So just relax for today and let me spoil you.”

Beatrice: “Stop it with your stupid comments, I suppose. I’m only collecting the Mana I didn’t bother collecting when Subaru was sleeping, in fact. Betty wants to always be at her best, especially in this Tower, I suppose. I want to avoid a lack of preparation, in fact.”

Subaru: “You say that, but in the end, weren’t you the one who held my hand while I was sleeping, even though you didn’t collect my Mana?”

Beatrice: “That was indeed unrelated to Mana, but an act for the purpose of recharging Betty’s heart so it doesn’t matter, I suppose.”

Subaru smiled as Beatrice puffed her chest as she proudly stated her Mana-unrelated intentions, and decided not to point out how it was a much more embarrassing thing.

In any case, Subaru raised his hand in agreement with Beatrice.

They had to keep the Second Floor Examination in consideration. By no means did he want to think that the First Floor's Examination also required heavy combat power, but he could not exclude the possibility.

Moreover, the Subaru and Beatrice duo had functionality even outside of battle. And for that, he needed Beatrice to be at peak condition at all times.

Subaru: "Alright, Beako! I'm good now so you don't have to mind me. Just keep on sucking out my Mana till you're round and plum…!"

Beatrice: "Betty's not going to puff up like a ball even if a lot of Mana is collected, in fact! Moreover, are you aware of how much Mana you have even if you are feeling good, I suppose. Can't have you collapsing again because I took what little Mana you already have, I suppose."

Subaru: "Oi oi, if that's the case, what'd you suggest doing?"

Beatrice: "Therefore! At the very least, you need to eat your fill, rest up, recover your strength and Mana, and also work hard and keep Betty company, I suppose. That is your mission, in fact."

Subaru: "I'm pretty sure I'm all good now, and I'm also pretty sure your true feelings about feeling lonely when left alone were mixed in there… Ah."

Subaru deftly bore a complicated mix of chagrin and charm on his face. Upon hearing the footsteps of someone coming from further back in the passage, he stopped walking.

That noise was produced by none other than Emilia, on the other end.

Noticing Subaru and Beatrice there, she approached, surprised. In her hands she held a metal container painted silver—— A bucket.

Subaru: "A bucket, huh. Even at times like this, Emilia-tan's giving her best, eh. Gonna practice singing?"

Emilia: “Fufu, what are you saying, Subaru. I sure do get a lot of help from Bucket-sensei when I’m practicing singing, now’s not really the time for it, you know?[100]”

Subaru: “Right, right. So what’s with the bucket again?”

Emilia: “Well… I’m getting Bucket-sensei to do his usual job, of course.”

Smiling at Subaru’s question, Emilia thrust the bucket to him. And, it was full of water, so indeed, Bucket-sensei was doing its original job well.

However, even if the bucket had fulfilled its purpose, there rose a question in that itself.

Subaru: “Uh, but, where’s the water from? The Tower is surrounded by a sand sea, right?”

Emilia: “Oh, no no, that’s where you’re wrong, Subaru. If you go past the Tower, really reaaally far, the Great Waterfall’s supposed to be there. And there reaaally is a lot of water there, so…”

Subaru: “You went all the way, just for a bucket of water. All for me.”

Emilia: “If it’s for you, Subaru, I wouldn’t mind doing that at all, but that’s not it. To tell you the truth, the Spirit in the Green Room can give us fresh and clean water.”

She wore pride on her face as she spoke for some reason, but Subaru felt giddy for that little bit she had stated before giving him the truth of the situation.

That if it were for Subaru, she would go fetch water from even the Great Waterfall. It made him incredibly happy.

Subaru: “While we’re at it, happy and all, you know… The Spirit of that room is really something. Going all the way, even outside of healing injuries and all, isn’t it?”

Emilia: “If it’s just making water, Beatrice and I can do it too with magic but…”

[100] This is a reference to a bunch of Shop Specials, “Emilia and Ram’s Bumpy Master-Servant Relationship” (full translation found here, done by SNUser) and “Emilia and Ram’s Bumpy Master-Servant Relationship” (full translation found here, done by WintryOne).

Beatrice: “The Miasma is too thick around the Sand Dunes and the Tower, I suppose. It would be much wiser to avoid drinking the water created from Mana affected by it, in fact.”

Emilia: “That’s how it is.”

Subaru: “I see, I see.”

Beatrice weighed on Emilia’s reluctance, and Subaru recognized the problem.

The problem of securing a source of drinking water for the journey up to that point, which should be regarded as important in a normal journey, had been more or less cleared by relying on magic.

As long as one had Mana, there was no need to carry a large amount of drinking water as it could be produced as much as needed, only the containers were necessary. Magic made things extremely convenient in this case.

Subaru: “It’s not air pollution, but more like Mana pollution, huh. So it’s like, bad for you? Drinking that water?”

Beatrice: “I don’t know if any immediate changes will be seen in the body, I suppose. But the more you drink, the more Miasma enters you, in fact. If that happens, at the very worst, developing a physical condition like Subaru and earning special attention from Witchbeasts may be possible, I suppose. I’m getting shivers just thinking about it, in fact.

Subaru: “It’s weird coming from me, but it really is kinda hard, living with it and all…”

He often made use of this specific property of his at various times, but it was more of a last resort and not something that could be used often. Even beyond that, if he went hiking in the mountains for whatever reason, there would be a risk of accidentally getting surrounded by Witchbeasts.

If given a choice, not having such a physical condition would be much better than having it.

Emilia: “And so we’re using the Green Room Spirit’s purified spring water as much as possible. We did the same thing when Subaru was sleeping for two days straight.”

Subaru: “Hmm, so that’s how it was.”

He felt impressed by the explanation of the unknown living conditions of Pleiades Watchtower.

And, as he mulled over the talk of spring water, a natural question hit Subaru. It even had to do with the caution he felt towards Shaula from just before.

Subaru: “Putting aside the water stuff, how’re we doing with the food? We did fill up on supplies at that city beyond the sand sea, but we did have a hard time with it.”

Emilia: “You can relax. Even with all that turmoil, the food didn’t just fly off somewhere. All of it is still in the dragon carriage. But, um…”

Subaru: “No matter how you distribute it, it’s not gonna last maybe even a month, is it.”

Even if drinking water had been put aside, there was a weight limit on what could be carried on the dragon carriage. Moreover, food needs were not limited to Subaru and the gang. Their partner dragons, Patrasche and Gian, needed food as well. Keeping that fact in mind, they had stocked up on a month’s worth of food.

Barely escaping the Tower with their lives, was not the only topic on hand. They had merely a month’s time to conquer Pleiades Watchtower proper, and head off to the nearest town safely.

Subaru and the others’ deadline to capture Pleiades Watchtower was just that one month.

Emilia: “————”

Subaru: “That said, I really don’t plan on being here for the whole month.”

Emilia: “Subaru…”

Noticing a hint of worry in her eyes, Subaru smiled.

They had a deadline, and their challenges were many, but they could start shying away from them.

Subaru: “Anyhow, in just one day… Ah, well, I got us off to a late start, so to be fair, it’s the third day since we got to the Tower but, we’ve already cleared the First Examination and Emilia-tan easily nabbed her victory in the Second.”

Emilia: “I-it really wasn’t «easily nabbed», though…

Subaru: “You’re supposed to season this part with a good bluff, so it’s completely fine.”

He pointed his finger at a serious Emilia, arrogance at full throttle, then pulled Beatrice closer to him and placed his chin on top of her head.

That way, both Subaru and Beatrice were looking up at Emilia.

Subaru: “Doesn’t matter if the opponent’s the strongest former Sword Saint or whatever. Beako and I are gonna lambast that one-eyed sexual-harassing chopstick bastard’s face in with our brilliant strategies.”

Beatrice: “That is so, I suppose. Lambast his face in, in fact.”

Emilia: “Lambast, lambast…”

Subaru: “Who even says «lambast» these days?”

Emilia: “No count! That’s so unfair! Subaru and Beatrice kept saying it so…!”

Having fallen into Subaru and Beatrice’s collaborative trap, Emilia puffed up her red-dyed cheeks in anger.

As they added in a new pattern to their usual back and forth, Emilia sighed as if it could not helped, her worry fading a bit more.

Emilia: “Un, fine, I get it, I get it just fine. Hearing it from Subaru makes it feel like it was really easy. But that makes you sound just as reliable.”

Subaru: “Yeah, just have faith, keep on hoping and keep on loving me. That’s why I’m your Knight, after all.”

Emilia: “That’s right, isn’t it? I’ll be in your care, then, my dearest Knight.”

Subaru: “Uh, just now, you didn’t deny the love part, so I’m kinda shaken…”

Emilia: “——?”

The whisper of love he had mixed into their usual banter seemed to have been brushed aside smoothly, so he felt slightly disappointed. Well, even if he had been properly answered, his feeling of being flustered would not have gone away, so it was actually better this way.

In any case——

Subaru: “I know it’s a bit late to ask, but isn’t it kinda weird that Emilia-tan was the one who was told to fetch water? This is the kind of work that’s supposed to be… not really done by your Knight but, isn’t it supposed to be the kind of work that underlings do?”

Emilia: “It’s really fine. Subaru might be my Knight, but I don’t want our relationship to be that of a master and servant’s. I just want Subaru to stay next to me. That’s all that’s needed to protect you, you’re recovering right now, so be obedient and be spoiled.”

Subaru: “What’s up with that, Emilia-tan!? If you’re gonna pamper me so much, I’m gonna die from happiness!”

Emilia: “Besides that, I’m in charge of today’s dinner! I want to do everything by myself!”

Beatrice: “It seems like she is serious about both statements, that’s what makes her so hard to read, I suppose.”

Beatrice let out a short sigh at Emilia’s statement. And then, as Subaru kept his chin on her head, she waved to Emilia,

Beatrice: “Look, Emilia. Subaru isn’t going to relax as long as you’re here, in fact. You’re delaying preparations for our meal as well, so hurry and be off, I suppose.”

Emilia: “Really? Okay. I’ll see you later then. Look forward to it, okay?”

Beatrice: “We’ll be waiting with «glee».”

Beatrice sent Emilia off in spineless Subaru’s place. Her response to Emilia’s words reflected a subtle difference in their perceptions.

Emilia: “I’ll call you when it’s done, so don’t go off too far, okay?”

Beatrice: “We’ll be going to the Fourth Floor, I suppose. As for if we can hear your calls or not…

Emilia: “Gotcha. I’ll use a louder voice.”

Beatrice: “…Okay, okay in fact.”

After exchanging smiles, Emilia went off on her way, bucket in hand, waving her hand as she disappeared around the corner. Seeing that, Beatrice looked up to Subaru, still resting his chin on her head.

Beatrice: “Now then, I hope you have calmed down, I suppose.”

Subaru: “…Yeah, I’m good now. I don’t really get it, but I suddenly thought Emilia-tan was really cute, you know. Like everything else but Emilia-tan doesn’t have color anymore, so I feel all better now that I got to see her really smile.”

Beatrice: “I don’t understand a word of what you’re saying, it’s worse than usual, in fact! And besides that…”

Subaru: “Besides that?”

He had spoken of his true feelings for Emilia, in poem format, with a straight face. So Beatrice pressed her back against Subaru’s chest and,

Beatrice: “It’s unfair you’re so full of Emilia, I suppose. Betty is Subaru’s *aikata*, in fact. Please act with awareness of this fact, I suppose.”

Subaru: “You, you’re really a cute little thing aren’t you.”

Beatrice: “Mmgyah——, in fact!”

As she seemed too sweet all of a sudden, Subaru picked her up and spun round and round in the hallway as he rubbed his cheeks against hers.

Subaru: “It’s fine, relax. I love you too. How do I put it, uh, right now, everything around me looks so beautiful, but you’re looking particularly spectacular. I love you, Beako!”

Beatrice: “W-wa-wa-wait, I get it, I get it, alright, so let me go! Let me down already, I suppose! I got it already, so let me down, in fact——!”

But even as Beatrice shouted, her face beet-red, Subaru would not let her down.

And so, he wandered around the halls of the Fourth Floor, spinning through each space available, Beatrice still in his arms, with glee.

The voices of the two would continue painting the halls with cries of joy for some time more, until Emilia’s shout of “The food’s ready!”, was heard.

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Now then, the total time before their meal was not literally spent spinning.

Beatrice presented him with a very thorough walking tour of the Fourth Floor, being his senior here, as she had spent two more days than him actively living in the Tower.

Though as it may be, in the first place, this place was called a “Watchtower”.

However, there was no need to be concerned about its habitability, and in fact, nothing extra needed to be done to improve the comfort of living, even in the designated residential area, the Fourth Floor. The only special rooms were the Green Room, which had become their treatment facility, and the large room which housed the stairs leading to the Third and Second Floors.

Apart from the large stairs leading to the floor below, there were only many smaller rooms scattered here and there, with no visible pattern to them.

Subaru: “It feels weird to not have a map, but I’m sure I’d feel even weirder if we had one. This Tower definitely has a creepy design, I’m absolutely sure of it. Really not a fan of these kinds of rattled arrangements of buildings…”

Beatrice: “What you are even talking about… Seeing how distasteful the contents of the Examinations are, it’s no use complaining about the wicked personality of their creator, I suppose. Too late for that now, in fact.”

Shaula: “Ah! That right there, that’s talking bad about my Master! You ankle-biter, you’re badmouthing my Master! He’s the one who built this Tower, you know! Are you okay with this, Master!? If you’re spoiling her just because she’s little, she’ll grow up all rotten, you know! You should scold them silly like they’re adults! And then, and then, you can spoil me as much as you want after! Come on over here!”

Subaru: “Just shut it already…”

Running her mouth as if she’d slain an ogre[101], Shaula tried finding fault in Beatrice. But in fact, Beatrice had said nothing particularly bad, but he felt it was a pain to explain.

There was no point in trying to differentiate between Subaru, her Master and the Sage each and every time. Even more since they were using that misunderstanding to their benefit.

Emilia: “Heeey, stop fooling around all the time. Shaula too, please, be quiet.”

Shaula: “Ehh, I can’t take this. This is discrimination. Discrimination between ankle-biters.”

Emilia: “If she really does something bad, Subaru will properly scold her and not just spoil her. And since he’s not, it means Beatrice did nothing to get scolded. And besides, it’s only natural that the younger ones are treasured more. We have to be patient, Shaula.”

Beatrice: “Even though Betty’s older than everyone else, it doesn’t sit well with me that I’m always treated as a child, I suppose…”

Subaru: “Yeah, yeah, just show off how old you are.”

He smiled as he petted Beatrice’s head to calm her down.

In response to Emilia’s call for their meal, all parties concerned gathered in the large room on the Fourth Floor—— The place where the dragon carriages and their cargo were being kept.

Everyone but Rem and Anastasia, due to both being unconscious, were present inside the dining room. All sat facing each other.

[101] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “This phrase means that someone is acting prideful or boastful but hasn’t done anything to warrant it.”

Everyone except those two, which meant——

???: "——Before we begin, would it be permissible for me to speak for a bit, Emilia-sama?"

Having been the last one to arrive at the room, Julius spoke.

While Julius had been practically thrown into the Green Room to recover from his injuries, his reason for appearing was definitely not limited to partaking in the meal.

He had refused the proposal of having his food being carried to the Green Room.

And to his answer his question, Emilia, who was managing the place, nodded,

Emilia: "Of course, by all means. But, you don't really need to ask for my permission, you know."

Julius: "As Anastasia-sama is currently absent, the one who ought to be respected the most is Emilia-sama. Moreover, my selfish attitude has already inconvenienced you. That it is only limited to this occasion, is something I cannot certainly say."

The response of Julius, as he shook his head, had everything articulated elegantly.

His humble mannerisms and his honest disposition were at last as was part of his usual nature. However, individuals who would not take his speech in a favorable manner were present as well.

???: "How admirable. If you only acted as such beforehand."

Subaru: "Ram…"

Ram: "We have enough recklessness and stubbornness with Barusu over there. In fact, it is far more natural to be disappointed in a person who seemed sane. I hope you will take care not to repeat this in the future."

Ram sharply evaluated Julius's arbitrary actions.

A chill in her voice and eyes were her usual features, but this particular time, Subaru felt her expression was much sterner. Even if she was harsh as usual, there was a certain hint of concern mixed into her words.

Emilia: “Ram, you went a bit too far this time.”

Ram: “…Please accept my sincere apologies, Emilia-sama. From hereafter, I will take more care.”

She immediately apologized for her bitterness, then gave a fleeting nod to Julius. As such, there was no point in further pulling this topic around.

Besides, it would not be right to blame Ram for not being as level-headed. She held no grudge, nor felt any hate for Julius. She simply wished to save Rem, and was doing everything in her power to do so.

Julius: “My sincerest apologies to both Miss Ram, and everyone else. I have caused everyone much worry.”

Understanding fully well that Ram’s words were only him reaping what he sowed, Julius bowed his head and dropped the matter from his side as well.

This was what Julius had wanted to do before starting their meal.

Subaru did have an inkling of an understanding for Julius’s prior behavior. So he had already forgiven him, but whether Julius had forgiven himself was an entirely different matter.

This was the first step he took, in order to start the ritual to absolve himself.

Emilia: “Okay! Julius apologized. I accept that apology. With that, I’m all done with this matter.”

Clapping her hands together, Emilia summed up her feelings on the matter of Julius’s apology. Subaru, followed by Beatrice, nodded.

Subaru: “Well, I’ve already let him have it from my part, so I won’t be saying anything beyond that out of samurai’s compassion.”

Beatrice: “Betty also has *samuray’s compashion*[102], in fact. It’s fine if you simply regain face with future actions, I suppose.”

[102] Subaru uses the expression “武士の情け”, which is literally translated as “samurai’s/warrior’s compassion”. Beatrice’s line is similar, but written “ブシノナサケ”, which is the Katakana of the expression’s pronunciation. To be interpreted as her saying the same as Subaru, but not knowing what it means.

Julius: "——My thanks."

Ruminating on those two's words, Julius whispered under his breath.

Following from Subaru and Beatrice, Meili suddenly responded to Julius's whisper of gratitude. While sitting on the floor with her legs stretched out, she fiddled with her braid as she spoke,

Meili: "Isn't it fineee~? He didn't die after aaall~. And I'm not particularly concerned about Knight-onii-san either waaay~."

Shaula: "Master's saying *mondai nai*, so *mondai nai* from me as well. *Monku nai*.[103]"

Subaru: "Yeah no, *monku nai* is something entirely different…"

Meili's thoughts were likely exactly as she put them, indifference rather than consideration for Julius. Shaula, who agreed, probably was in the same boat.

Much like Shaula, who was affiliated with the Tower and had not shown any signs of opening up to anyone other than Meili and Subaru, Meili's position in all of this was vague as well. And so——

Ram: "————"

Only Ram did not respond directly to Julius's apology, not saying a word about whether she forgave him or not.

She simply put her white robe over her head and stared down at her meal.

Julius wordlessly accepted that. Everyone apart from Julius did the same. This alone was a personal matter, everyone felt it would be best for them not to stick their noses.

Emilia: "——Well then, let's dig in. Ram and I were cooks for today."

Ram: "We could not use fire, so we put a bit of our manliness into it. Otherwise, it should be decent."

[103] Two Engrish flips. First one means "no problem" (問題ない), originally "ノープロ" (no prob). Second one is intended to mean "no complaint" (もんくない), originally "ノーパソ" (no-pass).

Emilia: “Hmm, that’s right. It’s reaaally decent… Doesn’t decent sound a bit weird?”

Her voice reminded everyone of their current state. Even though Emilia tilted her head to pose the question, neither Ram nor anyone else followed up on it.

Anyhow, following this exchange, everyone sat to have their precious meal.

Most of the food being carried in the dragon carriage were either smoked or dried rations, so naturally, the food would be coarse and tough—— However, magic proved to be of great use here as well.

Through the use of Emilia’s specialty of ice magic, it was possible to create a pocket refrigerator in the dragon carriage, allowing fresh ingredients to be stored for long periods of time.

Because of this, the party was able to have plenty of fresh fruits and other foodstuffs, being able to maintain and fairly balanced diet.

Emilia: “We still have to first use the ingredients that spoil pretty fast.”

Subaru: “We’re really lucky to even be able to worry about that, you know. Really, you’re EMS[104]! With this journey and all, I’m sure your cooking’s gotten even better, so maybe make miso soup every morning for the rest of my life?”

Emilia: “Sorry, I’ve got no idea what you’re talking about.”

It was true, however, that Emilia’s cooking skills had improved.

At the request of Emilia herself, cooking on this journey, was being done in rotations. Of course, it was a given that Emilia never cooked by herself, instead learning by following another cook’s footsteps.

Thanks to that, there was no one who kept burning their *daisukiyaki* platter pitch-black.

Because she was put in charge of the part of cooking that did not involve the use of fire.

Incidentally, among the members partaking in this journey the only people who could actually cook were Subaru, who had picked up this skill over his year of being a servant at the mansion, Julius, who

[104] Emilia-tan, Maji Shoku no Megami (エミリアたん・マジ・食の女神), translated as “Emilia is seriously a goddess of food”.

apparently was capable of whatever he set his mind to, and finally Ram, whose cooking was surprisingly decent.

Even on their way to Pristella, the only people who would put themselves on cooking duty were the male trio of Subaru, Otto and Garfiel, who then decided their order through rock-paper-scissors.

Leaving that aside——

Ram: "——Staring at me like that, do you have anything to say?"

Subaru: "…Nah, like, I know it's been over a month now since we've started this journey and all but, I still can't really believe it. That Ram can cook."

Ram: "I was wondering what you were going to say but this is just…"

Using his meaningful stare as an excuse, Ram sighed, unwilling to hide any of her distaste for him.

Ram: "The only reason Ram does not go near the kitchen is not because Ram cannot cook, but because she does not want to. I'm not going to use my skills for any kind of cooking that does not involve steamed sweet potatoes. That task can be handed out to Frederica and Petra."

Subaru: "So that's why… Well, that's that then."

Ram: "Hmm, that's that… I wonder why I make an exception just for steamed sweet potatoes, though."

Ram's visage crumbled into a complex expression as she questioned her own preferences herself. As Subaru gazed at her profile, he let out his own faint sigh.

No matter what household chore it was, Ram always lagged behind Rem.

Now, as all traces of Rem had been erased from the world, Subaru observed that their sisterly bond might have not been the same as their face-value.

In truth, Ram was supposed to be able to perform any kind of task assigned to her, regardless of whether it was present in her list of duties as a maid. Thus, it may be that, in the first place, she would not lose to Rem in terms of ability.

In other words, if Ram thought about doing it, she could do whatever she wanted when Rem was still in good health. The reason she did not was most likely related to her laziness—— or not.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru felt like he should not dig up those particular things.

The present Ram certainly knew nothing of that. And if Rem returned, he felt it would be unnecessary to bring up.

When she returned, rather.

Subaru: "I kinda guessed that's how it's gonna be, but you really have no table manners, do you?"

Shaula: "Munch, munch… Huh? Master, did you just say something?"

She blinked a few times at Subaru, who looked at her with a scowl.

The number of top-class beauties who completely wasted their good looks in this world was not low, and Shaula had to be the top-class of that top-class. To the point that she was on par with Liliana.

As she brought food to her mouth with her hand, Subaru scratched his head.

Subaru: "Oi, don't talk with food in your mouth. Eat or talk, do one."

Shaula: "Okaaay, then I'll talk with Master! I can talk to my Master for all eternity."

Subaru: "Who'd wanna get into a chat with you like this… Just be quiet and eat."

Shaula: "Okaaay."

While he had to feel a bit of respect for her level of loyalty, wanting to prioritize talking to Subaru above eating and such, he felt that, precisely because she was so ready to obey, Shaula's risk level was actually low.

Indeed, her nature as a person, her ability in every other respect, and the level of danger she posed to everyone, were all in utter imbalance.

Meili: “Say, naked onee-saaan~. You really have a, hmm, voracious way of eating, were you really that huuungry~?

Shaula: “Nah, it’s just that this food’s super tasty! I didn’t really think eating’s that big of a deal, but if it’s really this tasty, I wouldn’t mind becoming that half-devil’s disciple!

Emilia: “Eh? My disciple? As in, in cooking?”

Instead of stopping at Meili’s point, she went beyond the topic and snapped her finger to Emilia as she swallowed down whatever she was munching on. Emilia jumped, startled, while Shaula continued to shake her head up and down,

Shaula: “This cooking’s pretty good. You can’t fool my eyes. I’m gonna take up cooking too, get good at it right away and make my way into Master’s heart through his stomach, and not let him get any sleep tonight!”

Meili: “Your real intentions are leaking theeere~.”

Emilia: “Shaula, I understand your feelings. But you know, the way of the cook is a hard-trodden path. If you’re really ready, I’ll put some serious thought into taking you in as my disciple.”

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, you’re really cheeky about the weirdest things, you know.”

Besides, seventy-percent of today’s cooking was likely the result of Ram’s work. So it was hilarious to watch Emilia act like she had figured out everything there was to cooking, and Shaula who was a bit too taken in by amateur-level cooking.

Subaru: “I feel like I gotta get this out here, but there’s a lotta tasty stuff out there. Emilia-tan’s cooking is, uh… Well, it gets full marks just because she did it but, putting that aside, it’s pretty average. What are you usually eating anyway?”

Shaula: “Thank you for asking me, Master. My eating habits aren’t really anything special. I’m usually filling myself by roasting whatever beasts I take down.”

Subaru: “Whatever beasts you take down… Eh, wait, do you mean those Witchbeasts from outside?”

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by Setowi (source)

Shaula listened to Subaru's question, then folded her arms under her voluptuous mounds and nodded repeatedly.

To have a steady diet of Witchbeasts was too weird to be a normal thing. So to take the advice of a specialist, Subaru turned to Beatrice and posed the natural question with his look.

Subaru: "I know we just talked about not drinking water that's mixed with the Miasma a while ago, but."

Beatrice: "I don't even want to think if Witchbeast meat is good for the body or not, in fact. It's only that it's not something that's so dangerous that it'll have an immediate bad effect, I suppose."

Julius: "According to certain records, there were a few researchers who had set out to eat Witchbeast meat in the past."

As Subaru undid the wrinkles between Beatrice's brows with his fingers, Julius brought up an interesting piece of information.

As everyone's expressions urged him to continue after he stopped, Julius closed one eye and began anew,

Julius: "As you are already aware, Witchbeasts have a habit of attacking people. Be it in the middle of their march or during a long journey, if one were hard-pressed enough for food, they could find Witchbeasts aplenty, wandering within dangerous territories. After all, they never think of hiding. Witchbeasts will always come to attack. If one defeats them, then it was obvious that a good source of food would be obtained. There should be no doubt that there were individuals who truly thought this."

Subaru: "Well, did that go end well for them?"

Julius: "To improve their situation for nourishment, they apparently faced many twists and turns, went through much trial and error. However, no such improvement was found. Of course, those who ate it found it to not be poisonous but…"

Subaru: "But?"

Julius: "It seems there was a problem with the taste."

Subaru looked amazed, that it turned out to be a problem of taste.

If it tasted bad, then it was fine to cover it up with various spices or other condiments. It was true that the meat of wild beasts had this raw and earthy taste, but if it wasn't poisonous, then they ought to have at least tried a bit harder.

Julius: "That was as far as it was recorded in literature. Miss Shaula, what is your personal experience with it?"

Shaula: "It tastes like sand that's been rinsed in sewage water. Totally."

Subaru: "Ah, it's the kind where spices won't help."

Shaula: "If Master wants to try some, I'll whole roast a Hungry Horse King. It's so fucking bad, you get super addicted. I'm lying."

After finding out what unimaginable thing her four-hundred year diet was, everyone unanimously decided to no longer blame her poor table manners.

He politely declined the whole roasted Hungry Horse King offer. In the first place, that particularly disturbing Witchbeast was already on fire.

Subaru: "I thought having to worry about food was an actual problem, but…"

He popped himself down and covered his face.

At the end of his vision, there was Shaula, her entire face lit with a smile so bright, it could bring tears to others as she stuffed a variety of food into her mouth, and Emilia, who looked on as Shaula ate, her feelings of motherhood being further stimulated, which could potentially lead her to further improve her cooking.

One month, that was the amount of time left to them, which accounted for all their food, including their excess.

And if Shaula kept up the pace at which she ate, their time limit might just decrease even further, Subaru thought.

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Once their meal was over and they had their baths in the spring water (consisting of mainly wiping their bodies), the day was dubbed as over, and it was time to go to bed.

In light of their present situation, it could be said that the Tower Conquest Squad ought to spend the night trying to come up with a plan to break through their current stalemate, but at present, everyone felt that it would not work like that.

To expect tomorrow's matters to be solved by their tomorrow's selves—— might have been more appropriate than given credit for.

Subaru: "Not like we're just gonna get smacked in the face with it. Let's take a bit more time."

Given what the contents of the Second Floor's Examination were, worst-case scenario, they might have to go in again the next day without a plan at all.

Instead of thinking up a workaround, they would go at it with all they had—— though in truth, they all wanted to avoid being torn limb from limb. At the very least their Examiner, the First Generation Sword Saint, had no intention of killing them.

Or maybe they could even find a way to overcome this particular obstacle simply from conversing with him. Just like how Emilia had pried out her winning conditions from him simply by talking.

Subaru: "Well, gotta do what I gotta do to keep my head straight. So I have to eat well, rest well, and always be at peak performance."

He thought as he pinched both his cheeks, then put all his worries away for the day.

For the most part, Emilia and the others agreed with Subaru's point—— or rather, they were so demotivated, they had no choice but to.

And with that, the night's meeting was over. Each left for the dragon carriage, which they were using as a makeshift bedroom, to rest and prepare for the next day. At least, that was supposed to be the case.

Beatrice: "Subaru, Betty will be with Emilia and the others, in fact."

Subaru: "O-oh, gotcha. Sorry for making you worry, Beako. Don't stay up too late. You'll stop growing and get stuck in your small size… Wait, that's pretty cute. Alright, Beako, remember to stay up late."

Beatrice: “You don’t have to worry, Betty won’t grow any taller than this, I suppose. I’ll be cute forever, in fact. So I’ll be like this even if I sleep early, I suppose.”

After yawning, Subaru waved to Beatrice as she parted. As she left Subaru to say good night, Beatrice was holding hands with Emilia.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan, take care of Beako. See you tomorrow.”

Emilia: “Mhm, see you tomorrow… Subaru, don’t stay up too late either, okay?”

Instead of directly telling him not to, Emilia said her piece and headed down the Great Stairway to the lower floor. Once she was out of sight, Subaru stretched a few times, then walked down the Fourth Floor’s passage.

His destination was obvious. A door that was covered in ivy, the entrance to the Green Room. And there——

???: “Is that you, Subaru?”

Subaru: “…Ah, it’s you.”

In front of the room, Subaru ran into Julius, who gazed at him with eyes wide.

Just when he was about to enter the Green Room, Subaru had arrived, so he squinted at him for a good moment, then immediately pulled back his chin knowingly.

Julius: “I understand. It seems we share the same reason for entering this room.”

Subaru: “I’m pretty sure we have different people in mind… So, should I give it up to you tonight?”

Julius: “No need…”

Shaking his head at Subaru’s proposal, Julius looked to the closed door. A moment of silence followed, then the pair of yellow eyes were once again pointed at Subaru.

And then Julius took a step back from the door, as if giving it up.

Julius: “This time, it is I who ought to give it up for you. Thinking back, you were unconscious for two entire days until this morning. I did inform her of your wellbeing afterwards, but I am sure she yearned for your presence at night nevertheless.”

Subaru: “…Yeah, well, if you are giving it up for me, I shall just gladly take you up on your offer.”

Imitating his elegant style, Subaru scratched his head while stealing quick glances at Julius.

He found no signs of displeasure in Julius’ expression, but Subaru was bad at trying to snoop into someone else’s feelings in the first place. That went double for anyone who hid their true feelings. It was practically impossible for him at that point.

Subaru: “You okay with that? I’m pretty sure you want to tag along.”

So Subaru sighed and spoke what was on his mind in a straight-forward fashion.

Julius gave a thin smile in response, with a “Most definitely”,

Julius: “It is true that I would prefer being at Anastasia-sama’s side once she wakes up if possible… It is only that, I feel I will be unable to find the words to speak to her when she does. It is true that I am feeling lost about this aspect. It is most deplorable.”

Subaru: “It’s fine if you open with «I was very worried, so I’m glad you’ve awakened». The problem is with what comes next. That… uh, well, I’ll leave that to you.”

Julius: “Pfft.”

Subaru: “Oi, why’d you laugh. I’m being pretty serious you know.”

Even if he was being serious, it seemed that Julius had not taken it too fondly. He then gyrated on his heels, turning his back to Subaru, who wore a surprised expression at that strange reaction.

Julius: “You are able to freely say what you want—— I envy that.”

Subaru: “Kinda feels more like you’re calling me an idiot. Oi, where are you going.”

Julius: “I am relinquishing this place to you. I shall return to the dragon carriage and take rest. I feel slightly worn-out from today’s activities.”

Raising his hand while keeping Subaru at his back, Julius told him before leaving.

Whether he felt well enough to joke about the Examination tiring him only slightly, or whether he was simply putting up a front, was something Subaru could not tell.

He could not tell, but——

Subaru: “——Julius, it’s better if you’re there when Anastasia wakes up after all. When I’m done with my stuff, I’ll head over to get you, so you better do just that.”

Julius: “————”

Subaru: “I’ll let you know beforehand, but I’m pretty sure I’ve got a lot more regrets on my back than you. So this is my advice. Just take it.”

He shouted at the back that disappeared into the hallway. Whether Julius heard or not, he was unsure as there was no reply. However, Julius would definitely not take it the wrong way. At least, Subaru believed that.

Subaru: “Sorry for disturbing.”

With a shake of his head, Subaru threw away all considerations he had for Julius, and he pushed the door open, taking a step into the Green Room. The room, illuminated by a dim and faint glow, still remained dominated by greenery, with two girls who lay asleep on a bed of ivy.

Anastasia on the bed near the entrance, and Rem on the bed further back.

Subaru: “And you’re at the back too, huh.”

???: “————”

Regarding Subaru who had come to visit her, Patrasche let out a low growl. As if the jet-black dragon knew he would come.

Tactful as she was, perhaps Patrasche did indeed know that Subaru would come. Spontaneously, she moved away to make space for Subaru to sit on her bed of ivy.

Subaru: “Really, you’re one hell of a girl… Those wounds are healing up nicely too, eh.”

With a bitter smile, Subaru traced her black scales with his hands.

The wounds she had received at the time of the underground fight against the Hungry Horse King had healed nicely over the past three days. Normally, she would not let Subaru know the true extent of her injuries; now, however, she was genuinely focused on recovering instead of putting up a strong front.

Subaru: “Really, can’t thank this Spirit enough. If it weren’t for this room, who knows how hard this whole thing would’ve turned out to be.”

Subaru would never voice that it was good Patrasche had gotten off with shallow wounds, but it was true that the damage they had sustained in their journey through the Augria Sand Dunes had been minimal.

The only ones that had been injured were only Subaru and Patrasche. That they were able to come back up to above-functioning standard was all thanks to this Green Room.

Including the duo of Julius and Anastasia that had been wounded during the Second Floor’s Examination as well, the existence of the Green Room was indeed miraculous. As if someone had known this might happen and left it prepared beforehand.

Subaru: “Well then.”

Once he was done affirming his love for Patrasche, Subaru took a deep breath before heading towards the bed further inside the room—— towards Rem.

When there, the ivy shifted like flowing silk, gathering into a spot to make a sort-of chair for the standing Subaru to sit on.

Subaru: “Really, man, there should be a limit to how nice you can be.”

Even though he had just expressed his everlasting gratitude for the Green Room’s Spirit, he felt like it was taken as flattery for even better treatment.

That was far from his intention, but he took the offer anyway, and so Subaru sat down.

Subaru: “Julius did mention Rem’s been missing me at night, huh…”

That was a mistake.

That was not the case at all. Because, the one who was waiting to speak late at night, when no one would bother them, was not Rem, but surely Subaru.

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——Subaru noticed something was off when he felt his shoulders being lightly shaken.

Subaru: “——Uh?”

Raising his face from the bed, he blinked several times. Contrary to physical reactions, the mind was usually much slower to react.

And slowly, his consciousness returned to him. Returning to reality, he noticed.

Subaru: “Did… did I fall asleep?”

Hand on his chin, Subaru pondered the surprising fact that he had actually fallen asleep.

It seemed that he was still in the Green Room, still sitting on that chair right beside Rem’s bed, and it appeared he had dozed off in that very position. However, he felt that the shape of his chair was somehow different from what he remembered.

The chair in his memories had no backside. But now, the chair had a large backside to support him in his sleep, and it had taken an almost egg-like shape to conform to his whole body as much as possible. The hospitality of the Spirit was just too damn strong.

It was so comfortable, that it had turned yawns into actual sleep in advertently.

Subaru: “Means I was pretty tired too… Eh, Patrasche?”

Muttering about the feeling of fatigue he was unaware of, Subaru turned to the cause of his awakening—— Patrasche, who had nudged his shoulder with her long tail to wake him.

Curled up over the ivy bed, his beloved dragon had likely roused him to alert him to something. Subaru squinted at where she was staring and,

Subaru: "——No way."

Following Patrasche's line of sight, Subaru jumped off his chair and rushed over to the bed that was by the Green Room's entrance door—— the one Anastasia was supposed to be occupying.

It's "supposed to be" because she was not there to be found. And once it hit Subaru, his face lost color.

Subaru: "E-even though I gave Julius an earful about this…"

Only because he had dozed off, Julius could not greet Anastasia when she woke up. He could not even face him if he wanted to with this.

——Unfortunately, that was not the only problem.

Subaru: "She got up, and then…? Where'd she go? The toilet? Without waking me?"

It was not really a matter of whether she had actually gone to the toilet. It was that Anastasia—— No, more like Echidna, had woken up and snuck out of the Green Room, alone, without so much as a word of notice to Subaru, who was sleeping right there.

To think she had disappeared right after the Examination of the Second Floor—— Did she go to challenge Reid again, just like Julius? He did not even want to picture that.

Subaru: "The bed's still warm… Gotta go look for her."

Anastasia's bed was still slightly warm. There was the fact that Patrasche had woken him up as well.

Meant not a whole lot of time had passed since Anastasia's departure, most likely.

Subaru: "Patrasche! I'm leaving Rem to you! And, right, thanks for waking me!"

Patrasche: "————"

Shortening his reply as much as he could, Subaru waved to Patrasche before heading out.

Unable to figure out where exactly she could even go, his heart throbbed faster. If it were Subaru in her place, he would first want to make sure Emilia and Beatrice were okay—— If so, then naturally, she would be heading towards where Julius was.

Subaru: “No, wait, it’s Eridna who’s inside her right now. No way it’s gonna be anything simple. But then…”

He did not have enough manpower to tackle this problem. Even if it meant exposing his embarrassment of dozing off to others, for now, he needed to reach out to the others and get their help in finding Anastasia——

Subaru: “——Huh?”

And on his way down the stairs to call the others, he stopped.

He was dumbfounded and stunned, a dumb exhale leaking due to his reaction. It was the dumb voice that would exit one’s lips when finding something incredibly abnormal, something that definitely could not be.

Subaru: “————”

That something swiftly crossed an astonished Subaru’s field of vision.

With white wings spread wide in the narrow hallway, a bird gloriously flew.

Subaru: “Why’s there… a bird, inside the Tower?”

The words rolled out of his mouth at the sight of a bird, an existence that should not be present there.

Pleiades Watchtower’s walls had no windows connecting to the outside. The Tower was a building that was completely closed off from the outside world, with the only connection being the giant door on the Fifth Floor.

At the very least, that was what Subaru believed, and his guide for the Fourth Floor, Beatrice herself, had said the presence of a window that could lead outside was something she did not have an inkling of.

Subaru: "——Tch! W-wait up!"

Feeling something was very off, Subaru hurriedly began his pursuit of the bird as it flew away.

For a moment, he hesitated. Should he follow after the bird, or should he call someone because of Anastasia's absence first, then discuss the bird issue?

Subaru chose to follow the bird, however. To lose sight of that bird here, he felt, might lead to an even greater danger down the road. Simply put, it was a gut feeling.

Subaru: "————"

Of course, birds were not such gentle creatures, to listen to Subaru and stop flying simply because he called after them. Gently it flew away from Subaru, further and further, deeper into the hallway.

He chased and chased and chased, and before long——

Subaru: "——!? It disappeared?! What the hell!"

He shouted upon reaching the end of the hallway.

The hallway of the Fourth Floor itself was circular, taking after the shape of the Watchtower. However, it was not connected like that, because at around half-circle, a wall stopped further progression.

It was like a clock. If one started at twelve o'clock, they could go till 6 o'clock both clockwise and counter-clockwise, but no more than that either way.

Subaru knew that, and as long as none of the doors to the rooms were opened, he was certain he could catch the bird, but——

Subaru: "Doesn't look like it slammed into the wall and fell. What the hell's going on here…?"

Confused as to where that pair of wings had disappeared, he surveyed his surroundings over and over.

Unfortunately, there were no open rooms the bird could enter. It had appeared suddenly and disappeared just as suddenly. He felt like he was wrapped around the smoky veil of a dream.

But he soon confirmed he was not dreaming.

Subaru: “——These are feathers, right?”

On his way back out of the hallway, Subaru found white feathers fallen on the ground. While he still held his doubts, looking at it from a situational perspective, these white feathers definitely belonged to that bird he had been chasing.

They were proof the bird definitely existed. He could very well take them to Emilia and the others and say, “There was a bird inside of the Tower!”, but it would ultimately lead to nothing.

Most of all, it would not lead to where Anastasia disappeared off to——

Subaru: “Wait, wait… If there’s feathers lying around here, then.”

There should be something here.

Subaru searched the wall and floor around the place where the feathers had fallen while thinking that. He examined the stone floor and ceiling, checked the nearby rooms, and even pressed the stone bricks of the walls.

However, there was nothing akin to a trick to be found, and he only felt his pulse quicken with each passing moment. Really need help—— And, it was precisely at that moment.

Subaru: “Ah——!?”

It was when he was moving his palm over the place the feathers had fallen. His fingers had brushed against the wall right beside there, or so he had thought. In reality, he realized his fingers had slipped through the wall, as if it were an illusion.

Even when he carefully tried to press his fingers against it, they went through, so it was no optical delusion.

Subaru: “But, I’m pretty sure I’ve checked the walls around here pretty well.”

That was not to say he had failed in searching properly, but only that the wall above his waist was solid, and an illusion had been set lower than that.

An illusionary wall that covered up the entrance—— the last time he had seen something like this was back when Petelgeuse and the Witch Cult were hiding in that cavern[105].

Subaru: “Risk it all to win it all, huh.”

If one went into a crawl, they could pass through the illusionary wall.

After a good moment of hesitation, he decided to crawl through and get to the other side. The bird had gotten in through this way, most likely.

If this led to the outside of the Tower, or maybe to another part of the Tower, then——

Subaru: “Puah!”

The darkness beyond the wall did not last as long as he expected.

Subaru dove out of the illusionary wall and took a deep breath, like someone coming back up from a dive underwater. He was holding his breath while inside that darkness for no apparent reason.

He quickly noticed the outside air that flew across his face—— a cool breeze.

Subaru: “——Woah.”

He opened his eyes, slowly adjusting them to the darkness of the outside world.

Spreading out in all directions over the vast horizon and under the night were the Sand Dunes, seen from a height unfathomable. And watching over this spectacle was the dark sky, spotted with countless twinkling stars. And there——

???: “————”

Waiting in the place that was supposedly the Watchtower’s balcony, her purple hair fluttering in the breeze, surrounded by flocks of birds, was Anastasia.

[105] A bit of cut content from Volume 5, Chapter 5, Section 7: this is a bit of a useless detail, but here it is detailed that Petelgeuse’s hideout was hidden by an illusory rock, appearing solid on the outside, but transparent from the inside, and functioned sort of like a hologram.

Arc 6 Chapter 32 – Just Who

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 6 “Recommendations for Living Together in a Tower”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Before that unforeseen spectacle, Subaru could not be anything but dumbfounded as he gazed in amazement.

It was a night wherein curious occurrences were happening consecutively.

Starting from him unintentionally dozing off, to running about in search of Anastasia, or rather, Eridna, who had disappeared from the Green Room, catching sight of a bird which was not supposed to be inside the Tower and chasing after it. Losing sight of that bird at a dead end, and finding a concealed passage by investigating the familiar walls and floor——

Subaru: “——After emerging from the tunnel, what lay before was a country of snow[106].”

The persiflage he spilled out made no contribution to explain this queer spectacle.

What Subaru had passed through was not a wall nor a tunnel, and neither what lay before his eyes was a snow country, rather a night with the wind blowing through the sand sea.

Twinkling stars emerged in the sable skies, and the dim scenery of Sand Dunes stretching afar was visible from the Watchtower’s balcony.

Nothing corresponded with Subaru’s words. Instead of that——

[106] This is a reference to a well-known passage in Snow Country (雪国), a work written by Literature Nobel Prize recipient Yasunari Kawabata (川端康成).

???: “Natsuki-kun?”

Hearing Subaru’s husky mumbling, a person’s shadow, with hair dancing in the wind, turned towards him.

The young girl held her purple wavy hair down with her hand—— spherical pale-cerulean eyes, skin so fair it was distinctly visible in the darkness, possessor of a lovely appearance.

It was Anastasia, whom he had been searching. Subaru hesitated for a single instant upon her call,

Subaru: “…It sure is the ideal picturesque scenic spot in the middle of the night, huh.”

Hiding his initial astonishment under his tongue, Subaru shrugged his shoulders before Anastasia. Upon his gesture and the topic he had brought up, Anastasia smiled faintly saying, “Sure as”.

Anastasia: “’Tis true the view’s great. But, it sure’s sad that the scenery’s all black. Would’ve been different had just the town been visible far away too.”

Subaru: “That’s true, but the charm of glancing into the sea of night isn’t so bad either, you know. Besides, even if you say that…”

Saying so, Subaru pointed his finger towards the sky, instead of the unbroken view. Hooked by that, Anastasia too looked up into the sky—— visible was the entirety of the starry sky.

Subaru: “The air’s cold and clear, and stars are really visible. It sure is romantic, isn’t it?”

Anastasia: “’Tis true the stars are pretty, ‘n I agree the air’s clear… but it makes ya feel somethin’ aside from just viewin’ the stars, no?”

Subaru: “And that something would be?”

Anastasia: “The fact that the stars are visible itself. Was there ever a night where the stars were visible in the desert up ‘til now?”

Told so by Anastasia in seeming amazement, Subaru clapped his hands saying “Ahhh~”.

「――ッー　ま、待てー」
強い異変の気配に、スバルは
遠ざかる鳥の後ろを慌てて追い始める。
「――ナツキくん？」
掠れたスバルの呟きを聞きつけ、
風に髪をなびかせる人影がこちらへ振り返った。

As she had pointed out, it was indeed marvelous to be able to view the stars from the balcony like this should the journey through the sand sea up until now be taken into consideration. It was impossible to spot the glitter of stars from the areas surrounding Pleiades Watchtower. Because——

Anastasia: “The Miasma’s dark ‘n thick, and must’ve spanned ‘cross the sky like clouds, after all.”

Subaru: “For that to not be the case here means that just this Tower alone is unaffected by the Miasma… or perhaps, it may be at a height above the enshrouding Miasma.”

Anastasia: “At this height, well, that ain’t impossible.”

Though he noticed only after viewing the scenery from the balcony, their current altitude—— the level pertaining to the Fourth Floor of the Watchtower was not at a height of a few dozens of meters above ground, but at an altitude of several hundreds of meters. Though it did not actually feel that way, the stairway from the Fifth Floor up to the Fourth was of that length, was the meaning.

Subaru: “…But still, I don’t know if it’s accurate to judge distance in the middle of the Tower from this spot.”

Standing parallel to the outer wall, Subaru looked up towards the Tower instead of the scenery from the balcony and sighed.

If his conjecture was correct, regardless of being at a position above the Miasma, the summit of the Tower, seemingly piercing through the clouds, could not possibly be seen. It was far too high up, regardless of the darkness.

That was why the stairway to the Second Floor had more than four-hundred steps. Therefore, it was unquestionable that the Tower was wasteful in its capacity. Anyhow——

Subaru: “————”

Restraining his thoughts regarding the stars and the Tower’s height, Subaru had his eyes glance towards Anastasia. Elegantly having her lips smile, with her hands behind her hips, Anastasia made no suspicious movement.

All signs of vigilance or hostility were nonexistent as well.

At the very least, he confirmed she possessed no unconcealed animosity——

Subaru: "——So, what's your excuse for this situation?"

Anastasia: "Excuse?"

Subaru: "Stealthily leaving the bedroom late at night, going through a secret passage nobody knows about, playing with birds in the night's breeze… way too suspicious."

Subaru raised his jaw and questioned Anastasia, who had a mystified expression.

Birds—— yes, birds.

In this place, the two of Subaru and Anastasia were facing each other but multiple other spectators crowded the balcony aside from just those two.

With not the slightest movement, they were birds which continued watching over the situation like artificial articles.

Birds: "————"

Not one or two birds, they were not in such gentle numbers at all.

The number of birds halted on the outer edge of the balcony with their wings resting was lower than fifty. Numbers which would make one think it was an entire horde, but the reason he hesitated to label it as a horde was because the variety of the birds was not uniform.

A white bird, a blue bird, a black bird, a spotted bird, a large bird, a tiny bird, a slim bird, a plump bird, birds of mixed variety with no sense of oneness had assembled as a single set.

That truth alone was quite bizarre, but what made Subaru feel even more ominous was the behavior of the birds which had constructed this spectacle.

——Despite such a multitude of birds present, not even a single flap could be heard, let alone a chirp.

It was not confirmed whether the birds possessed the intelligence to mutually understand each other's will.

But at the very least, these birds without any sense of oneness, had their intent determined as one.

Anastasia: “It can’t be helped that Natsuki-kun’d feel uneasy like this, but…”

Regarding such suspicion of Subaru’s, Anastasia had her hand touch her cheek.

Anastasia: “Secret passage, that’s really an exaggeration, ain’t it? After all, Natsuki-kun managed comin’ here too.”

Subaru: “That’s… Well, a bird sort of led me, you know.”

Anastasia: “In that case, that’s the same for me too. I was just strollin’ inside the Tower at night. Then a bird jumped outta nowhere. I got curious wonderin’ what was up with that, ‘n ended up gettin’ here.”

Subaru: “————”

Anastasia: “Why, won’t’cha trust me?”

Anastasia straitened her eyes, as she let a bird she was holding with both of her hands fly freely into the sky.

Though obvious, it was not a convincing explanation. He had no basis to deny it, but there was no way something so convenient had happened. Pigeonholing himself, that was the conclusion Subaru arrived at.

Subaru: “This bird is…”

Anastasia: “I wonder what’s up with these kids.”

Subaru: “——Hk. That’s, what I want to ask.”

The gaze of the birds watching their exchange from a distance felt apprehensive, though the same also went for the evasive Anastasia’s attitude.

It was difficult to read emotions in the eyes of birds, or perhaps they truly wielded no emotion, he could feel the alienation which would make him think that way.

Just what were these birds, this balcony, this Anastasia thinking.

Subaru: “Knowing nothing like me… That’s way too convenient a story for me to swallow.”

Anastasia: “I’d also like to say somethin’ about Natsuki-kun not knowin’ anythin’… but, it’s really troublin’. Everythin’s been so confusin’ ever after arrivin’ here.”

Dear oh dear, saying so whilst putting one hand on her eyebrows, Anastasia displayed a behavior of drowning in lamentation. Looking at that Anastasia without letting his guard down, Subaru suddenly remembered something about birds.

——That birds flew over the Augria Sand Dunes, in the direction of Pleiades Watchtower.

He had heard that in the bar they had stopped by to prepare for crossing over the sand sea, with the purpose of heading towards the Tower. The bartender had told them to look for birds in case they got puzzled over the way through the sand sea.

Fortunately, Subaru and the rest had not made a blunder like being stranded in the desert, so it turned out to be a warning he almost entirely forgot about, but——

Subaru: “Looking at this now, makes me think that was not necessarily just some rumor.”

Despite receiving Subaru’s whispering, the birds gave no response.

They merely had their wings folded silently, and were letting their wings rest as if they despised flying in twilight.

Despite being exposed to the chilling breeze, they did not huddle close to each other and refrained from sharing warmth. They merely had their gaze towards Subaru and Anastasia like exquisite dolls.

Anastasia: “These kids’re always like that. I’m at a loss too.”

Subaru: “Judging from my experience, that’s a bit impossible for me to believe.”

Anastasia: “Judgin’ from experience, ya say?”

Subaru: “Based on my experience, upon heedlessly coming across a scene like this, it’s generally guaranteed that your life is in danger.”

Subaru had an abundance of near-death experience due to his heedless behavior.

Starting from being beaten to death by Rem, when he was loitering around the old mansion at night.

A lot of stuff that was being left out had happened back then, but Subaru's experience taught and made him conclude that heedless behavior was paramount to death in its essence.

And judging from those experiences of his, he thought of this situation to be quite dangerous——

Anastasia: "If that's so, then better add a new pattern to those judgements based on experiences of yers. That won't be happenin' this time."

Subaru: "————"

Anastasia: "For the cowardly Natsuki-kun, the worst probability's if I'm plottin' somethin'. So I lured ya to this Tower and spun up some outrageous conspiracy, to harm Natsuki-kun or Emilia-san and the rest beyond repair's what'cha thought… isn't it?"

Having gotten struck bullseye, Subaru slightly stiffened himself up.

Looking at how Subaru was acting, Anastasia smiled with an "Easy to get".

Anastasia: "Relax. I'm not thinkin' about somethin' so roundabout, 'n I ain't got no hostility against Natsuki-kun. Nor for anyone else, in this Tower… Ah, not countin' the Examiners."

Subaru: "Shaula and Reid, huh."

Anastasia: "————"

The moment he voiced those names, Anastasia silenced herself with a bitter expression. Looking at that response, Subaru spilled his voice saying "Ah",

Subaru: "You didn't hear about it because you were sleeping, right? About that guy who newly appeared for the Second Floor's Examination… he's Reid Astrea. The First Generation Sword Saint. It seems like the arrangement was to have him appear from the past."

Anastasia: “This Tower has a questionably outrageous layout… I wonder, just what was its creator thinking.”

Receiving Subaru’s explanation, Anastasia lowered her voice and added one more thing at the end of her repulsed comment. Sensing the omission of the Kararagi dialect’s accent in her tone, Subaru halted his breath.

Up until now he had intended to treat her and deal with her as Anastasia. But after all, her true nature, before his eyes like this, was that of——

Subaru: “——Right now, only you and I are here. How about talking your heart out frankly?”

“Anastasia”: “Wh…”

Subaru: “To be honest, I can’t make any progress with you, who’s wearing the mask of someone else. No matter what I’m told, it’s impossible for me to trust you down to my very core. That’s why…”

“Anastasia”: “——You say that you wish to exchange words with me, not the me who acts as Ana.”

That instant, Anastasia’s presence changed as if responding to Subaru’s proposition.

The mood surrounding her completely changed, though her form didn’t change, the sense of existence he was standing off against definitely altered. The emotions dwelling in her eyes, the expression interweaving her thoughts, had changed completely.

Subaru: “————”

And, before Subaru who halted his breath witnessing this transformation, Anastasia—— no, the Artificial Spirit Echidna, who had been acting as Anastasia, slowly turned towards the outer edge of the balcony.

With not a railing to prevent falling, only a fence of a pathetic height is all the outer edge possessed. She slowly placed her hips on that fence and gently caressed the head of the small white bird standing still right beside her. And——

“Anastasia”: “——It is indeed the first time, that we have exchanged words with just the two of us all alone here.”

Saying so, she accepted Subaru's proposal with a fleeting smile.

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"Anastasia": "Won't you come here?"

Subaru: "No, I mean, it doesn't have a railing, and my counter plans for safety are way too incomplete so nope."

"Anastasia": "Not at all, I will not push you off even if you get closer with your guard down, you know?"

Subaru: "No way am I trusting that tone. You're just like the original, when it comes to stuff like that."

Subaru distorted his lips before Echidna, who was sitting at a boundlessly hazardous spot and invited him without any malice. But, perhaps she did not like the way he phrased his refusal, and furrowed her eyebrows frankly.

And then, she said "You see?", and raised a single finger as if lecturing him,

"Anastasia": "I have told you several times, but how about you stop viewing me together with that original Witch or whatever? To say it clearly, it is nothing but unpleasant to be compared with someone unknown. That is, even if it is my own creator."

Subaru: "That goes for this manner of speaking too, but… I guess so, my bad. I'll be careful."

"Anastasia": "Kindly be."

Echidna appealed to Subaru, with the same appearance and voice as Anastasia.

In all honesty, from what he had pointed, it was truly just like the tone of the ill-natured Witch Subaru was acquainted with, her insistence comprised of a circumstance whereby he must earnestly nod in assent. The truth is, if Subaru were told he was an existence similar to Echidna, it would be an opinion that would make him respond with something terribly dishonorable as well.

Anastasia: “With that being said, your worries are quite right. Seeing someone night after night head to a place noticed by nobody, all alone, would naturally make one suspicious. However, on top of accepting those misgivings as a matter of course, I shall deny your misgivings once again.”

Subaru: “You sure are bold to be touching that bird without even being vigilant.”

Anastasia: “…Did you hear what I said just now?”

Subaru: “I heard it indeed.”

Immediately, their comments were at crossing paths with regards to each other.

However, it could not be helped that what was far more mysterious to Subaru was the small bird—— how she was caressing the ominous small bird’s head like it was some artificial article, rather than her statements.

Things would have been different had this been a park in the afternoon and the birds gave a more natural reaction, though.

Subaru: “Aren’t you afraid that you’ll get killed if they, like, swarm together and peck your entire body?”

“Anastasia”: “Well, your imagination is far more frightening. You will not say that this is another one of your judgements based on experience, will you?”

Subaru: “You see, something happened where cute-looking rabbits jumped on me with all their energy… and things turned out like that.”

Thus ever since he had been nervous of a large number of animals gathering at one spot.

Piling up multiple experiences of Return by Death, he had confirmed and could claim that there existed no easy death, but that memory was a remarkably awful manner of dying.

“Anastasia”: “…You are actually making a pale face, so I will not put pressure on you. It is not as if I am affectionately familiar with these birds, either.”

Perhaps due to seeing Subaru's face get increasingly pale, Echidna promptly retracted her hand from the small bird. And then putting both of her hands on her knees, she once again gazed towards Subaru, saying "Well then".

"Anastasia": "You suggested me, to let my heart out frankly… I wonder, what do you want to talk about with my self who has forgotten about behaving like Ana?"

Subaru: "For now, your relationship with this place, and these birds."

"Anastasia": "Regarding that, I can only respond with what I had answered as Ana. I was led to this place by a bird, as well. Until then, I had not the faintest clue. Just…"

Subaru: "Just?"

Despite the dejection for lack of substitution of that response, Subaru raised his eyebrows in pursuit of the faint catch to it. Slightly hesitating upon his reaction, Echidna continued.

"Anastasia": "To be completely honest, I was thinking of asking you the same thing."

Subaru: "Asking me, the same thing?"

"Anastasia": "I was intending to be Ana so it may have come off as a joke, isn't it. I found myself here as if I was led to this place. And now, I am having dialogue with you in this place… with you, who is standing in front of the entrance to return to the Tower."

Subaru: "————."

"Anastasia": "You are an acquaintance of Shaula's, the keeper of this Tower. At the very least, she treats you with that conviction completely. Taking that into consideration, being informed on top of just the two of us being in this place does seem cowardly to me but…"

Engulfed by the words Echidna voiced, Subaru was unable to interrupt her comments. Before that Subaru, Echidna cut her words off once, and whilst retaining Anastasia's face, presented a question.

That question was——

"Anastasia": "——Natsuki Subaru, just who are you?"

Subaru: “Just who you say, but…”

“Anastasia”: “Let us go back to the time before heading to Pristella. After the ceremony conferring honors of fulfilling the subjugation of the White Whale, and the subjugation of Sloth, one year ago. Ana, conducted an investigation regarding you.”

That which Echidna had revealed, perhaps had been one of the plans in Anastasia Camp’s strategy for the Royal Selection.

Investigating Subaru, who had accepted the conferral of decorations as the Knight of the rival candidate Emilia, must be something which could be called theory in a fight of this type.

But, the great merchant Anastasia Hoshin, who led the Hoshin Company was——

“Anastasia”: “Your background could not be gained knowledge of. Ana complained that investigating the most minimal information alone was extremely difficult. Regarding that, I believed that perhaps the people around you were doing something rather than you yourself, that’s what the result was.”

Controlling the information regarding Subaru, if there was someone with a deep connection to the camp doing that, then the first one on the list would be Roswaal, followed by Otto and Clind, perhaps.

Anyhow, it would not be strange of them to be doing that. And they were either far too unkind or far too boorish to go out of their way and refrain from informing that truth to Subaru.

“Anastasia”: “After all, what could be reached was only around the little happening you got involved with in the Royal Capital, right before the commencement of the Royal Selection. When Knight Reinhard discovered the candidate Felt, there is evidence that he happened to catch sight of you. But, that is all.”

Any records prior to that were not supposed to exist.

Henceforth, Echidna—— though it was Anastasia in this case, Anastasia’s investigation had followed Subaru’s footsteps nearly perfectly.

Excluding the fact that that was an insufficient result for them.

Subaru: “————”

Echidna narrowed her eyes, as Subaru silently wondered how he should respond.

Until now, he'd had multiple experiences of being unable to convey the information from Return by Death and burying it within himself, and subsequently suffering due to being unable to share the information. However, this was a first-timer for him.

For the question to be just who Natsuki Subaru was, and the unidentified nature of his origins acting as chains.

Subaru: "I am…"

"Anastasia": "——And, that's how I just lined it all up."

Subaru: "——Ah?"

Echidna unfolded both of her arms before Subaru, who tried to somehow wring out some words with a serious expression. Her tone was far too indiscreet, as Subaru stood dumbfounded.

Receiving Subaru's reaction, Echidna nodded saying "Hm" with a satisfied expression.

"Anastasia": "Ana and I recognized you, as a newcomer Knight with a pile of extremely meritorious deeds, with that kind of an unknown background… that was, until Pristella. I have no words for how that impression changed with the fight against the Witch Cult in Pristella… but I am aware that it is again changing slightly after coming to this Watchtower."

Subaru: "————"

"Anastasia": "I felt anxious for being with you alone late at night in a space beyond the sights of anyone, so even if I was on guard against you, I want you to forgive it as something which could not be helped."

Folding her open arms, Echidna tilted her neck whilst smiling.

And taken aback by the words he had heard from her, Subaru mumbled and moved his dry lips and earnestly pondered over how he should react.

However, during the time he was pondering he suddenly noticed.

——That the fingers in Echidna's hands atop her knees, wielded so much strength that they would turn white.

Subaru: "…You, don't tell me, are you seriously scared?"

"Anastasia": "——That comment, is slightly upsetting. Just as an example, what kind of a relationship do you actually have with Shaula?"

Without responding to Subaru's question, Echidna fired back a separate question.

Subaru: "I, met Shaula for the first time here. I don't know anything."

"Anastasia": "The Examination of the Third Floor, was it a coincidence that you cleared it so quickly?"

Subaru: "…It was a coincidence."

"Anastasia": "In that case, what about you going through the secret passage camouflaged in such a way that it cannot be noticed at first glance, and calling out to me in a situation where I happened to be alone?"

Subaru: "————"

What resumed persistently, was Echidna's bitterness directed towards Subaru. By stockpiling questions before Subaru, she was conveying this.

Subaru: "How about you, try imagining being in my position…"

"Anastasia": "But still, due to various factors I estimate you as an existence who has a low possibility of being hostile. And I want you to think of me revealing the depths of my heart as a proof of my good faith."

With her hands on her slim chest, Echidna demonstrated that she had voiced her true mental state through her attitude.

From Subaru's perspective as well, he very much wanted to agree with Echidna's words, now that he once again looked back onto his origins and the suspicious nature of his actions.

Very much so, but——

“Anastasia”: “——It rather seems like my creator left deep wounds upon your heart, does it not.”

The behavior of the Artificial Spirit Echidna indeed closely resembled that of the Witch of Greed Echidna, so no matter how much good faith she devoted, it was difficult to truly trust her.

This itself, could precisely be called as the Witch’s Lingering Scent.

Subaru: “I get, what you’re saying. I’m, convinced. Keeping whether I’m able to trust or not aside…”

“Anastasia”: “Your troubles have been conveyed quite well.”

Subaru: “That is, even if you and I meeting here is a coincidence. Then, what’s this place? What do you think this balcony-like place was made for?”

As a matter of fact, even if this Echidna were plotting something, there existed no evidence that would make her open her mouth. He complied with her not because he trusted her, but because he considered it an inevitability.

However, that and the fact that this place was a concealed space are entirely different subjects. Due to being concealed and everything, there must be some kind of worth to its existence.

“Anastasia”: “I have a hypothesis regarding that. Do you remember what happened three days ago… in the sand sea?”

Subaru: “Three days ago, that’d mean before we reached the Tower, some totally messy stuff comes to my mind.”

“Anastasia”: “At the occasion of that ruckus, a white light attacked us when we were being pursued by the Courtesan Bears—— It rather seems like that was Shaula’s doing. Then, this place is.”

Subaru: “——Her scaffold, for observing the desert?”

Before Echidna’s hypothesis reached its end, Subaru clicked his fingers.

Her conjecture was convincing. The truth was, she had continued to snipe those who approached the Tower with what she called *Jigoku no Sogeki* from a long distance. He had wondered how she did that with there not being a single window or way to view outside of the Watchtower——

“Anastasia”: “Perhaps, there are places like this connected through the circumference of the Tower. From what it seems, this space is not in the direction from which we approached the Tower.”

Subaru: “What about the birds?”

“Anastasia”: “The birds are an enigma. Even if they are touched like this, they give no response. It is just that they still perhaps do have warm body temperature, they are not actually artificial. If possible I would like to dissect them…”

Looking down onto the birds beside her, Echidna straitened her spherical eyes with cruelty. However, as she drew her finger back, she stared intensely at that finger.

“Anastasia”: “Unfortunately, I do not want to put any more burden upon Ana’s body. Things would proceed faster if you dissected the birds…”

Subaru: “Well, I’ll do it if it’s really needed no matter what…”

In the one year he had spent living in the different world ever since being summoned, Subaru had gained some experience of hunting birds or hare. Of course, killing for the sake of eating and killing for the sake of experimenting felt way too different——

Subaru: “After killing it, as for eating it…”

“Anastasia”: “Yes, there was also the problem of remaining food supplies. Then, I would like to request around twenty of them.”

Subaru: “Bloody bastard! Don’t you know about Legend of Zelda!?”

Indifferently requested to reap the lives of a large number of birds, Subaru raised his voice harshly. Echidna rounded her eyes having been yelled at over knowledge she had no way of knowing.

That aside, killing twenty would indeed aggravate his spirit.

Subaru: “Besides, upon killing there would also be some movement in these countless birds too, you know?”

“Anastasia”: “…That, seems undeniably frightening.”

In response to Subaru’s distress, Echidna also put her hand on her mouth.

The birds gave no reaction to the perilous conversation of the two, but their gazes alone were unchangingly fixed upon the outsiders to this place, or rather, Subaru and Echidna.

With the words “sky burial” accidentally appearing in his mind, Subaru detained Echidna’s prompt judgement.

Subaru: “If we’re going to do it, then let’s do it after making some preparations. For the time being, let’s keep it for later.”

“Anastasia”: “No attitude of running away either, huh. Got it, very well… the truth is, it is difficult to even think about what could be gained from investigating these birds.”

Subaru: “Um, please stop with an atmosphere of stuff like the spirit of inquiry or comments on the success of thirst for knowledge.”

“Anastasia”: “——?”

He thought that Echidna, despite truly not knowing the nature of the Witch, maintained a behavioral style similar to the original, and resultantly he never let his guard down.

Henceforth Subaru ignored that aspect, and threw a question towards the Spirit aspect of Echidna, which was unlike the Witch.

Subaru: “I didn’t really confirm it properly, but how’s Anastasia-san?”

“Anastasia”: “…Just like earlier. Even now, Ana is continuing to sleep within the depths of this body. I have never dwelled in the body for this long, so I would be lying if I said I am not getting impatient.”

Subaru: “Impatient?”

Subaru considered the nuance and thought she must be talking about wanting to return to her former body, but Echidna shook her head left and right, saying “That’s not it”.

“Anastasia”: “So far as it goes, Ana and I have a contracted relationship of a Spirit and a user. Though it is an imperfect relationship… an imperfect Spirit, along with an imperfect user. I believe I have spoken about Ana’s body.”

Subaru: “Ah, about there being some defects in the Gate, and stuff.”

“Anastasia”: “That is close to the relationship between the present you and Beatrice. What is different from you two is that Ana’s body has no receptacle to receive Mana at all. In order for her to maintain her Contract with me she has no choice but to spend her Od.”

Subaru: “Hm, hm?”

He thought of that explanation as roughly the same as what he had heard before. However, Echidna believed Subaru’s understanding was rather shallow, so she put a finger on her chest and,

“Anastasia”: “This state is equivalent to me manifesting in Ana’s stead. Which means Ana’s Od is being eaten up at an increased rate. Even now, moment by moment, Ana’s Od is being grated.”

Subaru: “I believe Od was, like, the soul itself of the person… which means.”

“Anastasia”: “On top of assenting the dangers of having a Contract with me, Ana took my hand. Ever since then, I hypothesized that some day, the end would arrive… but now is, rather soon.”

——That was why, the body must be returned to Anastasia as soon as possible.

That was how Echidna brought explaining the situation Anastasia and her had been placed into to an end. Upon hearing what she had said, Subaru realized that he had been taking their circumstances far too lightly.

Subaru: “With that body… in that tattered state, can she really become something like a Monarch?”

“Anastasia”: “Do you mean that in the sense that you want Ana to abandon that privilege for the sake of your own master?”

Subaru: "——Hk! Don't joke around! Nothing like that! I was…"

"Anastasia": "Ana will not draw back, no matter what. Nor will she give up. I know that."

Echidna asserted flatly before Subaru, who stepped ahead trying to raise his voice.

Overawed by that vigor, Subaru blinked his eyes. And then timidly had his lips tremble,

Subaru: "…Does Anastasia-san, want her own country so badly. Even though if she gets her hands on it, she might have to immediately let go of it."

"Anastasia": "Though perhaps shorter than what normal people would, Ana herself will utilize that short span of time ways better than the others. Besides, Ana has a reason to not give up the throne."

Against Subaru's powerless voice, Echidna declared putting her trust in Anastasia into it.

And recited, her reason to not give up the throne. It was——

"Anastasia": "——Because she wished for it."

Echidna, who had already stood up, conceded towards him and faced Subaru head-on from the center of the balcony.

Gazing into the black eyes right ahead of her, as Subaru stood immobile at the words the pale cerulean eyes had conveyed to him.

A heaviness unlike that of Pleiades Watchtower, of the Examinations, pressed Subaru down.

Subaru: "————"

Immobile, speechless. Nor did Echidna say anything.

And instead of the motionless two, only the sound of flapping wings slashed through the chilling night. The sound of fluttering wings came from behind, as it was appended to the flock of birds who were resting their wings.

Once again a single bird, flew towards the balcony——

——From behind.

???: “————”

Just as before, Subaru had been standing with his back turned towards the outer wall of the Watchtower. If a bird flapped its wings behind him, then it would unquestionably arrive from the interior of the Watchtower.

Echidna, Subaru, had reached this place, upon being led by birds.

Then, naturally, that was also the case with the flapping of the third bird.

???: “——What is the meaning of what you were saying, right now?”

A voice, somewhat astonished, somewhat in disbelief, echoed in the balcony.

The birds spread their wings wide at once, upon the voice of the standing man. And, giving rise to a terrible sound of flapping wings like a cloudburst, the birds attained flight lacking all vacillation.

Towards the night sky, towards the desert enveloped in the dusk.

Leaving Subaru, Echidna to seemingly drown in an ocean,

——Along with Julius Juukulius.

Arc 6 Chapter 33 - ■■■ ● ■■■[107]

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 22, Chapter 7 "■■■■■■", Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — Part 1, Part 2

Left behind by a myriad of fluttering feathers, abyss descended on the balcony in the night.

Decorative birds spread their wings fearlessly, and took to flight into the murky night sky.

One could almost say that falling from that lonely sky would have been easier than remaining in this place.

If only that were true, Subaru would have wholeheartedly embraced that notion—— at least that would have been the worst thing, after this suffocating situation.

Subaru: "————"

The location was the Watchtower, on a balcony hidden by the night.

Julius stood there, blocking the doorway, with doubt carved into his handsome features and rigid cheeks. Within his line of sight, were Subaru and Echidna, who had been secretly conversing in the night—— to Julius, she would have been Anastasia, since they looked exactly alike.

Julius: "——What is the meaning of what you were saying, right now?"

In that tense, congealing space, Julius repeated these words with a sense of much tension.

[107] Each of the blocks is hiding one Japanese character. Given the ● is usually employed as a separator for characters' names, it most likely denotes a character's name.

The bewildered content of his words was no different from the moment before, but his voice sounded weaker in this repetition, like proof of the of the depth of his sorrow.

——When, had he begun listening to the conversation?

Subaru: "————"

Faced with Julius's question, Subaru forced his halted thoughts to move, and landed on this question. When had he begun listening, that was the most important thing.

The content of that conversation with Anastasia, or rather, Echidna, just now, was definitely not something he should have been allowed to hear before preparations had been made. For in the conquering of this Watchtower, the secrets kept by Subaru and Echidna were simply far too deeply rooted.

Things ranging from Artificial Spirits, the Witch of Greed, the Authority of Gluttony, and their various implications.

Subaru had hidden all of those from Julius, having judged that they would only complicate things, and bring him nothing but suffering.

Most important of all, was the fact that Anastasia's consciousness was sleeping, and that right now, the one inhabiting her body was the Artificial Spirit Echidna. In other words——

"Anastasia": "——Ahh, come on, Natsuki-kun, stop lookin' like that."

Subaru: "…Huh?"

Suddenly, lightly poking the stiff Subaru in the chest with her finger, Echidna put on a charming smile.

Her tone and attitude were so perfectly like Anastasia's, that for a moment, Subaru bulged his eyes in stupefaction and could not be entirely certain as to what was happening.

Leaving Subaru behind, Echidna did a turn on the spot as if dancing, and,

“Anastasia”: “I’m sorry, Julius. But it’s not like we’re leavin’ ya outta the loop, ya know. I just thought I’d talk with Natsuki-kun ‘bout some of the important things that’ll be happenin’ after we leave Pleiades Watchtower, that’s all.”

Julius: “————”

“Anastasia”: “We had to leave the Green Room since Rem and that ground dragon kid were there, ya know? It’s not like we’re afraid of any special secret leakin’ out, but I was just in the mood for somethin’ extra secretive. So we moved ‘round… and this just happened to be the only suitable place we could find. That’s all.”

Clapping her hands together in front of her chest, Echidna slightly tilted her head as if to say “Forgive me?”

That adorable gesture appeared to be just the kind of thing Anastasia would do. But, unlike the one trying to distract away from the vital part of the story, Anastasia would never sink as low as this.

As if attempting to cover up an unfavorable scene after the other person had already seen it, the words only came across as barren and superficial—— actually, one might as well replace the “as if” with “certainly” there.

It was a very undesirable situation for Echidna, having been caught off-guard. The only difference was that she just happened to be quicker than Subaru in taking action. And then——

Julius: “——You are not Anastasia-sama, are you.”

“Anastasia”: “————”

Julius: “Echidna, I want you to tell me. Even with it having already come to this point, the fact that you are still trying to hide it from me, tells me you probably are not a bad person by birth.”

Through a faint glimmer of hesitation, Julius asked Echidna to her face. Hearing this, Echidna muttered “Why that’s just…”, and for a moment, appeared to be preparing to refute him, but,

Julius: “Echidna.”

Once again, Julius halted her with his call. And, just like this, she turned Anastasia's face toward Subaru, an indescribable emotion stirring within those light pale-cerulean eyes.

But at this point, even Subaru could not devise a way to salvage this.

Subaru: "Julius, where do you want us to begin?"

Julius: "…From Anastasia-sama's body."

In response to Subaru's question, Julius replied in a choked voice.

That much was more than enough to discern his disturbed emotional state. It was natural. But even so, it must be said that only a man like Julius would have been able to remain calm at a time like this, even if only on the surface.

Or perhaps, it might simply have gone too far beyond his limits, and too far beyond what emotions could convey.

"Anastasia": "Ever since the battle with the Witch Cult in the city of Pristella, Ana's consciousness has been sleeping deep inside her body. So, right now, the one moving her body is not Ana herself, but I, playing her role in her stead. Until today."

Echidna probably thought it was no longer possible to go on pretending. Plainly, without any set-up, she simply spoke as if laying out the facts.

In the middle of defending Pristella against the Witch Cult, Echidna took Anastasia's place, and dueled with the Witch Cultists—— Anastasia's spirit had been asleep ever since.

They had hidden this from Julius and Ricardo, and all the members of the Iron Fang, before they set out for Pleiades Watchtower.

——This fact, was only shared between Subaru and Echidna.

Julius: "Why, would you only share this information with Subaru?"

"Anastasia": "He was not under the influence of the Authority of the Sin Archbishop, and so he was the only person outside the chaos of the situation. Besides, he is also a Spiritual Arts User that has forged a

Contract with an Artificial Spirit bearing the same roots as I, Beatrice. I must confess this was not my original intention. However…”

Julius: “——However?”

“Anastasia”: “However… he saw through my act as Ana, so I had no choice but to tell him.”

Hearing this explanation of why only Subaru had come to know that it was Echidna inside Anastasia’s body, Julius’s eyes began to tremble beyond control.

Echidna had been at a loss of words, because she expected nothing but discomposure.

Of course. Because Subaru had seen through Echidna’s performance——

Julius: “Someone who barely knows her, something even a stranger should notice, and yet someone who regards himself as her one and only Knight did not…”

Subaru: “Stop, you dumbass! You can’t say that!”

Julius: “————”

Subaru: “Your situation… you were just in a bad situation! There was a huge thing that had just happened to you, and you were down in the dumps! And it wasn’t just you, there was Ricardo and Mimi and the others as well, right? I only noticed because… of something, anyway, it just happened by chance!”

Listening to Julius deriding himself with those words, Subaru attempted to put a stop to his self-injury. However, in his failure of his duty as a Knight, there were no words that could console him.

In reality, just what could Julius have done? Was he really to blame for this?

The master he devoted his loyalty to, his comrades with whom he had sworn a vow with, his fellow Knights that have always been his companions, and all the many, many more, everything he had accumulated up to now in his life as a Knight, had collapsed like a wall of sand. How can he stand before them again?

Stalwart. Elegant. A Knight. How could he ever be called that again?

If being a Knight meant never permitting oneself to succumb to one's pain like a common human being, then being a Knight was a curse for Julius Juukulius.

Julius: "It is the duty of her one and only Knight to eliminate chance, and be certain at all times."

Subaru: "——! Then being her one and only Knight is… nothing but a troublesome title, isn't it…"

Julius: "Take back those words, and do not direct them to me again. I… right now, I-I am afraid I have lost some part of myself…"

Subaru's consoling rationalization simply bounced off in the face of Julius' knightly convictions. Watching as Subaru fell speechless from the emotions clogging up his throat, Julius shook his head.

Julius: "Let us get back on topic—— Echidna, what is your intention?"

"Anastasia": "…To return this body to Ana. That, is the reason I brought you all to Pleiades Watchtower, even more importantly than the victims of Gluttony and Lust."

Julius: "In other words, you mean to say you never wanted this. And you have no way to restore Anastasia-sama… even if I slay you."

Placing his hand on the Knight's sword at his waist, Julius narrowed his eyes and threw her this perilous question.

Receiving this, Echidna cast down her eyes, and gently touched her own chest.

"Anastasia": "That I am an evil Spirit, and have taken over Ana's body for that reason… I cannot give you any evidence to refute that speculation. So, if you are convinced that I am lying to you, even if you choose to destroy me, I cannot stop you."

But, at the end of her last syllable, Echidna continued after pausing only a beat.

"Anastasia": "But in that case, any possibility of restoring the consciousness of Ana's empty shell will be extinguished by your hand… In the worst case, it will become difficult to even preserve her life, and there is a chance that she will die."

Echidna laid out her thoughts on Julius's suggestion of cutting her down. Then, having said this, she softly lifted her hands,

"Anastasia": "Of course, this is only a nonsense possibility I had no choice but to come up with because I want to live. Even I, cannot say for sure whether my death would be the solution. If I must die so that Ana can live, I feel like I would be alright with that. Though I really do not wish to die."

Julius: "And why, would you be willing to do that for Anastasia-sama?"

"Anastasia": "The relationship between Ana and I is an incomplete one. Therefore, perhaps it is not right to apply it to the common way of being of a Spirit and a Spiritual Arts User…"

Cutting off her words there, Echidna looked at Julius and Subaru in turn.

Even though their beings were different, it seemed almost as though she envied the two of them, who had a proper contract-bound relationship with Spirits, as Spiritual Arts Users.

"Anastasia": "I like Ana. And I have been at her side ever since she was a young child. So I do not wish to abandon her, and I want her to be happy—— That, is my reason."

Julius: "————"

"Anastasia": "Julius, I did not reveal this fact to you because it would have only led to unnecessary confusion. Ana herself had wished to keep my existence secret, if possible. In fact, she was the reason I had remained hidden all the way until what happened in Pristella. It was all thanks to that child."

Even back in Pristella, Julius had been quite shocked when Anastasia announced that she had been hiding Echidna for so long.

Subaru, who had prioritized retrieving Emilia above all else, could not possibly imagine what storm must be churning within Julius's chest at that moment.

Just that, in such a short span of time, what his master had kept hidden—— along with the secret pertaining to the fundamentals of Anastasia herself, had all been revealed to him at a time when they should not have been revealed. Just how much must all of this be weighing on Julius?

Julius: "…I can understand your relationship with Anastasia-sama. It is difficult to believe everything. But, I have no choice but to believe you. At least, in that it would be thoughtless to do anything to you right now."

"Anastasia": "Oh, is that so? I am glad you chose rationally, Julius. I am sure Ana would be glad as well."

Julius: "————"

Letting go of the hilt of his Knight's sword, Julius did not respond to Echidna's words, and only remained in silence.

But he was far from having understood it, and thinking of it left him with a sense of regret. Yet, in the blink of a moment, Julius cast this out of his mind, and,

Julius: "I just wish to confirm this. Anastasia-sama's Od is the price for your ability to continue to manifest yourself… So naturally, the more you strain yourself, the heavier the burden on Anastasia-sama's body will be. Is that correct?"

"Anastasia": "Correct. That is the right way to understand it. If I eat well, sleep well, get some moderate exercise… take a generally healthy approach to life, it would be just enough to counteract the toll on Ana's Od."

Julius: "If that's the case… then why did you pull that stunt on the Second Floor?"

Just as Echidna was slightly recovering herself, lightheartedly joking in between her words, Julius struck her with this unexpected question.

Considering what had occurred on the Second Floor, it's only understandable that he would point this out——

Julius: "During my fight with the Examiner of the Second Floor, Reid Astrea, Anastasia-sama… using Anastasia-sama's body… you casted magic… to support me."

It was at the time of the first clash between Julius and Reid.

Faced with the overwhelming power of Reid's swordsmanship, with Julius helpless and on the verge of defeat, Echidna used her enormous magical power to direct magic toward Reid.

Far from being a decisive strike, and instead the load on Anastasia's body went over her limit, and she fainted. But the problem was not the result.

It was why had she done so. Just that.

Julius: "The burden of that act on Anastasia-sama's body could not have been light. After saying so much, your actions are still conflicting with your claims. So why?"

Subaru: "That's…"

What Julius pointed out was also what Subaru had been wondering.

Back there, Echidna had taken action as Julius was overpowered, him carrying an expression as though he was resolved for death. There seemed to be a lie somewhere, yet it did not feel like it was precalculated.

It must have been borne out of pure concern. Could Echidna have chosen to help Julius simply because, while living inside Anastasia, they had already spent so much time together—— could that be all it was?

However, to Subaru's doubts, and to Julius's question, Echidna only replied "I am sorry", and deeply bowed on the spot,

"Anastasia": "Even I feel like a failure there. How should I say this, it is embarrassing to admit I am not very proficient at it, but I made that decision from a strategic point of view."

Julius: "A strategic decision?"

"Anastasia": "At the time, I had no idea whether the Examiner of the Second Floor had the intent to kill. Had I not done as I did, Julius's fighting prowess might have been lost. Of course, I wanted to avoid it, for Ana. Besides, Reid Astrea had his back turned… and so it seemed a perfect opportunity, in my eyes. But not only did it fail, I have caused you distress."

Apologizing, and adding one more at the end for good measure, Echidna slowly raised up her body.

There were no contradictions within her explanation. While it was true that she had acted rashly based on amateur judgement, Subaru could not find any basis to refute her reasoning. Emotional ones aside.

Could such a story really be swallowed so easily?

But, before Subaru could pursue the point any further,

Julius: “——I understood. But please be careful not to do anything rash in the future. Not for anyone else, only for Anastasia-sama.”

“Anastasia”: “Understood.”

Subaru: “What!?”

Julius gestured that he had understood and accepted, and nodded back at Echidna. Watching their exchange, Subaru kicked at the floor much like he was sure if they were joking.

Subaru: “How can you be convinced by that…”

Julius: “Subaru, I am convinced. Echidna will refrain from doing anything rash in the future. What else is there to say? ——This is a matter between Anastasia-sama and Echidna, and between Anastasia-sama and myself.”

Subaru: “————”

Julius: “It seems you have been caught up in this by some strange mistake. But, this is a matter internal to the Anastasia Camp. This is not your pain to bear.”

Listening to Julius trying to distance him from the problem, Subaru clenched his back teeth. It was not as if Subaru was carrying this pain because he one-sidedly wanted to.

Subaru: “Whether or not I take this upon myself is my own damn business, isn’t it!”

Julius: “So you can take this upon yourself, yet deny me the right to face my own problems…? I do not seem to recall you ever telling me about Anastasia-sama and Echidna.”

Subaru: “——Guh.”

Julius: “Sorry. I should not have said this… But it is the truth.”

Wrenching this out in a choked voice, Julius turned his eyes away. Within that voice, that stubbornness, Subaru finally noticed it.

Julius had not remained calm at all.

Far from hiding the tempest raging in his heart, he could not even keep it from seeping through to the surface.

Having lost his own existence, and even the one thing that remained to him, his loyalty to his master, was shown to be a lie, their promise to tell each other every concern broken.

Even so, the man named Julius was not supposed to be subject to emotions.

Julius: “I do not intend to argue. For Anastasia-sama, we must find a way to deal with this situation as soon as possible. Echidna, I hope I can count on your sincere cooperation.”

“Anastasia”: “…Of course. Since you have already found out, I suppose there is no reason for me to continue playing the part of Ana anymore. Well, if you can tolerate me in the form of Ana, that is.”

Julius: “That is irrelevant. I must restore Anastasia-sama to the way she was, and looking at this form will remind me of what I must do.”

Hearing of his intention to hurt himself to strengthen his resolve, Echidna put on a sad expression. But Julius had already turned up to the sky, without seeing her face.

As if noticing for the very first time that the night sky from atop the balcony was unblemished by the Miasma, he squinted his eyes under the radiance of the stars.

Julius: “There is no reason to stay here for long. Let us return inside. As for Anastasia-sama’s body and Echidna… It must be conveyed to Emilia-sama and the others tomorrow.”

“Anastasia”: “Hoho, alright. I will prepare for it as well.”

With those words, Julius gently took Echidna’s hand and began to walk. Surely, it was exactly the same as what he had always done for Anastasia.

Whatever was inside, his loyalty to Anastasia would not morph—— even if she was sleeping deep within her body, even if she had forgotten Julius.

Subaru: “Julius!”

Feeling something painful at the sight of his figure, Subaru shouted out to him.

Having been abandoned by memories whilst still remembering everything about the others, having nothing left except to struggle, desperately relying on that sentiment—— having been there himself, he understood that pain.

Even if he had been forgotten, he could not forget. That thought alone gave him the impulse to move.

Julius: “————”

Julius halted his steps, and, still holding onto Echidna, did not turn around.

The fact that his back remained perfectly straight, in spite of all the turmoil within his heart, was just totally frustrating.

Subaru: “You… isn’t there something you want to say to me?”

Regarding Echidna, regarding Anastasia’s body, he had kept it all from him.

Tonight, he had promised to take over for spending time in the Green Room, but Subaru broke that promise, and secretly met with Echidna on the balcony.

He could make excuses. There were reasons. It was not that he meant to. But, regardless of his intents being malicious or not, regardless of his reasons, regardless of his excuses, his heart could not pull free.

So why don’t you raise your voice to shout at me? Swear at me, vent out your rage?

Subaru could not be sure whether it was his own sense of guilt, or whether Julius truly thought this. Surely, Julius would never.

Raise his voice, or spit out abuses——

Julius: “——There is.”

Subaru: “————”

Julius: “I understand. Why you believed this truth should remained hidden from me. You meant no harm. It arose only out of concern and consideration. I agree with your apprehensions. If our positions were switched, I would have kept my silence as well.”

Subaru: “————”

Julius: “——Yet, even so.”

Looking up to the sky. With a voice as if wrenching it out.

Julius: “Whether it is myself, or Anastasia-sama, or you, I do not wish to be thought of as someone unworthy of being a Knight.”

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No special procedures were needed of him to return to the inside of the Tower.

Just like the way he had entered the balcony, he only had to crawl down below waist-level to get through the hidden passage and come out inside the Tower. While crawling on his knees, the pointless thought suddenly occurred to him that Julius must have crawled through here in the exact same way.

Unfortunately, since he had already crawled back earlier, Subaru lost his chance to record this into memory.

It was because he was so overwhelmed by Julius’s final words, that he remained there speechlessly for a while.

Subaru: “————”

He had honestly thought that no words would have come out of him—— Except, that had not been the case.

Most likely, Julius believed that even if he shouted and sworn at a guilt-ridden Subaru, it would not have brought him any comfort. And since his virtue would not allow it, he could not hurl rage and complaints, but only swallow them silently on the spot.

But, that had not been the case.

The words Julius had left behind in the end, had pierced into his heart like a thorn.

Perhaps, Subaru would have felt better had he been yelled at. He did not feel that it would have been any easier, but it would have been better than to not being told anything at all.

However, reality was not as such. The thorn left by Julius insisted on pain, and blood continued to flow from its puncturing wound. Deep enough to make him hesitate about pulling it out.

Subaru: “I can’t… go back to the Green Room anymore.”

Chances were, Julius had already escorted Echidna back to the Green Room by now. After that, it would be unlikely that he would go search for a bed in the dragon carriage left in the lower levels.

This deep-rooted problem—— the sheer depth of it a fault of Subaru’s own poor judgment, was not something that can be cleared up overnight. At least, it would take time, and simply holding calm discussions would not be enough to resolve it.

Thinking about it that way, he felt a little embarrassed about going back to the dragon carriage. Even though he knew Julius would not return to that place, he would still feel somewhat guilty about tugging himself into a warm futon right now.

However, at this late hour, there was no one Subaru could spill his heart to.

The sleeping Rem and Subaru’s best-buddy Patrasche were both in the Green Room, a place he was too afraid to approach because of Julius and Echidna.

And it was far too selfish to wake Emilia and Beatrice up to make them listen to his whining.

So, at this point, there was no one Subaru could——

???: “——Barusu?”

Hearing that voice, Subaru made a muted sound with his throat and halted his steps. Turning around in astonishment, amidst the Fourth Floor's passageway—— where footsteps struck on the stone floor, he saw the form of the pink-haired girl, Ram.

Ram's crimson eyes were wide open, looking over Subaru from head-to-toe.

Ram: "It has been a while since I have seen you make that face. Disreputable."

Subaru: "…Why are you immediately saying that right after we meet. Come to think of it, what are you doing here this late?"

Ram: "I could ask you the same thing… Although, what Barusu could be up to at this hour would be unimaginable."

In front of Ram, who crossed her arms as she approached him, Subaru tightened his cheeks at her words.

Just the thought of what she might actually be imagining pulled a shadow over Subaru's face. Seeing Subaru do this, Ram shrugged her shoulders sadly,

Ram: "Anyway, you were bothering Rem with your whining again, weren't you? Even though Ram's little sister is cute and forgiving, do not be too unreasonable with having her do all the tough work."

Subaru: "…Ah, yeah. Well, you're right."

Ram: "——?"

Seeing Ram's eyes slightly widen as she heard this, Subaru let out a bitter smile.

He did not convey his true feelings to her, but only what she might have guessed based on his daily activities. It was true, just as Ram said, that Subaru often spent his nights at Rem's bedside.

In fact, he had already done so tonight. And it was only natural that Ram would think he had just left.

But today, it was not only that——

Ram: "Stop making that miserable face."

Subaru: "Ugh."

Ram: “With that pathetic, miserable expression, you look even lower than an already base manservant. Looking like that, people will begin to suspect Emilia-sama’s character for taking a Barusu as her Knight. Please revise.”

He felt Ram’s finger flicking his drooping forehead.

Subaru’s eyes teared up from the force, and just as he was about to protest, Ram disinterestedly harrumphed through her nose, shutting him back up. All the while, she herself seemed perfectly at ease.

Subaru: “…Geez, really, nee-sama is nee-sama, after all.”

Ram: “Haa. Please do not disgust me with your thoughts.”

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by DdukaE (source)

Subaru commented while stroking his forehead, and Ram put on an expression as if disgusted from the bottom of her heart. To feel salvation from such an attitude, he really must be pathetic.

No part of what she had said had carried any expression of warmth or sympathy, but, somehow, that was what it meant to him.

Subaru: “Ram, what were you doing at this hour anyway?”

Ram: “Disgusting.”

Subaru: “Don’t just suddenly end the conversation like that! We only just started…”

Hopelessly shrugging his shoulder, Subaru let out a quiet sigh, and turned his eyes to the passageway behind Ram—— where she had come from.

Although the Fourth Floor was very wide, there was nothing particularly remarkable here. There was a Green Room, and the luggage they had brought up from the dragon carriage. And——

Subaru: “…The staircase to the Second Floor?”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “Unless, you went up there. Alone?”

Ram: “Worry not. I am not as reckless as him. Albeit it might not seems as such, but I am not conceited enough to think I can manage Reid Astrea alone.”

Imagining something he would rather not imagine, Subaru twisted his lips, and Ram laughed through her nose as she denied his suspicions.

Amidst it, he noticed a subtle reference to Julius’s stubbornness evident within her words, but approaching that topic here and now would twist the thorn in Subaru’s chest.

Ram: “It seems, that something happened between you and Knight Julius. Had a fight?”

Subaru: “Am I that easy to read?”

Ram: “Barusu is as easy to read as Ram is intelligent. The latter has more to do with it, so rest at ease… No, of course the former has plenty to do with as well. It would not take long to get everything out of you under torture.”

Subaru: “The fact that you’re assuming I’d be placed under torture is kind of frightening, you know.”

Watching Subaru pick at his own cheek, Ram just squinted her eyes. Seeing that she was not jesting, Subaru shuddered a little.

It was true that, considering Subaru’s position, it was not entirely unlikely that Emilia’s enemies in the Royal Selection might resort to this kind of barbaric measures. Maybe it would be a good idea to watch out for that, after all.

Subaru: “In that case, what were you doing here…”

Ram: “——I did not ascend to the Second Floor. I only tried to go up.”

Subaru: “…I thought you just said you weren’t that reckless. Unless… were you thinking of attacking him while he’s asleep?”

Subaru had no qualms about using any means necessary to win. It might be understandable if Ram thought the same and planned to stealth attack Reid in his sleep.

The question was whether this Reid, which appeared to have been reproduced from the records of the past, really slept. And, even if he did sleep, could she really manage it in the first place?

Ram: “Unfortunately, it is impossible to attack him while in slumber. I turned back halfway up the stairs. He really is an abnormal monster. He would almost make Garf look cute.”

Subaru: “Although, after getting to know Garfiel, he’s pretty cute…”

Ram: “Not his antics, I meant the level of danger he poses.”

The way she put it was that she actually did not deny that Garfiel’s antics were cute, but since they were in the middle of something more important, Subaru frowned and forgot about it.

Ram: “I am convinced now. If one side has no qualms about using any means necessary, then the other side would use any means necessary as well. Like we have discussed, in order to beat him, we must not let him take it too seriously, and only then satisfy his conditions.”

Subaru: “…Just to make sure of that, you went up to the Second Floor alone?”

Ram: “Must I restate it over and over? I did not go up to the Second Floor. It is too difficult for Ram at this moment.”

Confirming that they simply were not strong enough, Ram warned of the need for preparations before challenging the Second Floor again. Speaking of needing more time, the thought of his argument with Echidna and Julius resurfaced once more, and Subaru could not help but take on a difficult expression.

Ram: “Barusu?”

Subaru: “N-no, it’s nothing… Well, it’s not totally nothing, but it doesn’t matter right now. Most likely, we’ll have a proper talk tomorrow.”

Ram: “A remarkably ambiguous statement.”

Subaru: “That’s kinda what I was going for, but, it’s not what you think. As expected, even here, I’ve done something ungrateful, and it’s a bit hard to recover from it this time.”

For now, it was a crack that he was not sure if it could be mended completely. He did not wish to complicate it any further and spread the crack even wider.

Watching Subaru’s defeatism, Ram still was not convinced, but decided to let it go.

Ram: “In any case, conquering the Second Floor… defeating Reid will require more time and effort. At least, it would be nice if we could count on Shaula’s support.”

Subaru: “Well, it would not be no exaggeration to say that she cannot exactly be counted on. Although, hadn’t she helped us earlier, we’d all be charred black under the sand right now.”

Without Shaula, they would never have been able to reach the Examination on the Second Floor in the first place. But even with that in mind, she had been a disappointing Sage ever since they entered the Tower.

Of course, if they could borrow the Examiner's own hand to pass the Examination, it would be quite exceptional indeed.

Ram: "If we only ever take the high road, we're bound to get stuck in a deadlock here."

Subaru: "It's not like I think it'd be better to take a more innocent approach. But, purely on a case-by-case basis… it just wouldn't work this time."

Ram: "You say that so effortlessly… Ram, does not possess that kind of leisure."

Dissatisfied with Subaru's answer, Ram shrugged her shoulders. And, while slowly turning her back,

Ram: "If you do not go to bed soon, it will hurt your performance tomorrow. I shall head back to the dragon carriage as well."

Subaru: "Ahhh, yeah. I, uh…"

He wanted to explain as to why returning was not an option for him, but it was too difficult. On the other hand, looking back and seeing Subaru mumbling this way, Ram spilled a small sigh.

Ram: "As you prefer. But if you drag us down because you did not get enough sleep, I will twist it off."

Subaru: "Ahh, no… Twist what off!?"

Ram: "I will leave that to your imagination."

With a wave of her hand, Ram headed in the direction of the stairs to the lower levels. Without touching on what he did not want to touch on, leaving him to stand up by his own efforts, could that have been her consideration?

Watching the thin back walking into the distance, even know that she would not gaze at it, Subaru raised up his hand.

Subaru: "Good night, nee-sama. See you tomorrow."

Ram: "…Ram is not Barusu's nee-sama. Stop calling me that."

Her last denial carried no strength within it, as if she had already accepted, and only resisted for the sake of it.

Watching Ram's figure disappear after leaving those words behind, Subaru clicked the bones in his neck and whispered "Ah, what am I gonna do now.".

He could not go to the dragon carriage anymore. And it was too difficult to return to the Green Room. In that case, he could either find some other place to rest till the morn, or find a place where he could do something meaningful with his time.

Subaru: "If I just want a place to sleep, I could find a suitable room…"

The top candidate would be the room where they stored their luggage.

The dragon carriage's cargo and food supplies had all been moved into that room, though it would be hard yet possible to find something he could use as a pillow. The bottleneck was just how to find some way to reduce the pain on his body while sleeping on the floor, aside from sleeping in the dragon carriage. Or rather——

Subaru: "Think about how to conquer the Second Floor, a strategy for defeating Reid."

Honestly, that would be the most constructive choice.

Most of the problems surrounding their current situation were about capturing this Watchtower. Though it could not be stated with certainty, it would nevertheless play a huge role in improving their situation.

That evening, the consensus they had reached on how to defeat Reid was to make him not take something seriously and then satisfy his conditions in earnest, or something vague along those lines.

At the very least, if there was a chance that some of the vagueness could be reduced in the slightest——

Subaru: "——That's it."

And, coming to this point, Subaru snapped his fingers.

As the idea flashed through his mind like a lightning strike, Subaru changed the direction of his steps with a bash.

Subaru: “If this goes well…”

Though he could not say for sure, it should be a move that could greatly advance the situation.

Setting his heart on that thought, Subaru sprinted toward his goal.

——In the Watchtower in the night, loud, spirited echoes of Subaru’s footsteps rang out.

——Only the echoes of a lone person’s footsteps.

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——The sensation of waking, was like the moment of emerging out of the water’s surface.

Pulling the dreaming, unconscious body upwards, using a breath to restore the entire body to reality, the consciousness slowly reawakened, and, breaking through the water’s surface, he was born.

If sleep was death, and wakefulness was life—— then that description would not have been far off.

Anyways, such poetic sentiments aside, he gradually began to wake——

???: “——Subaru! Hey, Subaru, are you alright?”

Subaru: “What the!?”

The moment he opened his eyes, immediately stricken by the beautiful face at their corner, and Subaru rolled to the side.

And, not rolling very far before running out of surface, he dropped a short distance and landed on his shoulder.

Subaru: “Ngya!”

???: “Eek! Subaru, you alright!? Why did you start rolling all of a sudden!?”

Subaru: “N-no, it’s not like I willingly decided to roll or anything…”

Squeezing his banged-up shoulder and lightly shaking his head, he pushed himself up. And then, in the blink of an eye, Subaru was confused.

It was a Green Room.

The entire interior of the room was covered by sprawling ivy that completely hid the walls behind them. If he was told that the whole outlandish-looking room was made of ivy, he probably would've believed it.

And apparently, Subaru was lying on the floor, beside a bed woven from ivy at the very center of the room. He had probably rolled off it; that would be his analysis of the situation.

It was funny that Subaru could make such a judgment so calmly, but there was reason for that.

???: "Hmm, it looks like you didn't hit anything too hard. That's good. But I got reaaally worried, you know, you shouldn't scare me like that."

???: "Emilia, if you say it like that, Subaru won't reflect on it, I suppose. If you don't say it more severely, Betty's worries won't get through to him, in fact."

Emilia: "I guess you're right. But I'm surprised Beatrice would be saying that. After going into such a panic when we couldn't find Subaru, you were almost in tears when you found him lying there…"

Beatrice: "You don't have to mention the part that dispenses mentioning, I suppose!"

In front of his eyes, a conversation like comedy was unfolding.

Nodding stupidly in agreement to the sunny bickering, Subaru turned around. Sitting on the floor and breathing right behind him, was some kind of huge creature.

Subaru: "————"

There was, a giant lizard. With black scales covering all over its skin, it was a huge lizard the size of a horse. The strangest part was that it was gently snuggling up to Subaru's nape with its nose.

Seeing that it was friendly, Subaru gently petted the lizard on its head.

And then, he let out a sigh.

Subaru: “In other words, this is it.”

Calm, and collected, slowly, he breathed out these words. Seeing Subaru like this, the two girls in front of him tilted their heads.

Beatrice & Emilia: “——Subaru?”

And, like two sisters speaking with the same breath, they simultaneously called Subaru’s name.

A silver-haired girl, so beautiful that his eyes wanted to explode, and a fairy-like little girl in a pretty dress.

A beautiful silver-haired girl, a drill-loli, a giant lizard, and a room made of ivy——

Subaru opened his mouth wide, and shouted it out.

——Because this was, this was, this was.

Subaru: “I’VE BEEN SUMMONED TO A PARALLEL WOOOOORLD!?”[108]

[108] Note from Tappei at the end of the Chapter: “Finally made it this far. The main story of Arc 6, the Hall of Memories, begins here.”

Illustration from Volume 22, coloring by Norvak (source)

Character Pages for Volume 22

シャウラ
Shaula
プレアデス監視塔の星番。
スバルのことをお師様と呼ぶ。
Shaul
レイド・アストレア
Reid Astrea
最初の『剣聖』であり、世界を
救った三英傑の一人。
『剣聖』の家系・アストレア家は
彼から始まったと言える。

Characters

Re: Life in a different world
from zero
The only ability I got in a different world "Returns by Death"
I die again and again to save her.

スバル
Subaru

砂漠仕様の我らが主人公。
オレンジのスカーフと黒マントが
どことなくジャージを思い出させる。

CHARACTER DESIGN
眼帯
EYEPATCH
酒
SAKE

Web Novel Volume 23

Author Nagatsuki Tappei
Illustrator Otsuka Shinichirou
Translators
Witch Cult Translations
TranslationChicken
Web Novel
Volume
23
Re:ゼロ
Re: Life in a different world from zero
から始める異世界生活

Arc 6 Chapter 34 – Coming Out of the Convenience Store, There Was a Wondrous World

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 1 "Walking out of a Convenience Store and into a Mysterious World", Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by TranslationChicken — Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, Part 4

Natsuki Subaru had been born into the lax educational environment of Heisei Era Japan.

If the whole story of the entire seventeen years of his life were to be told, it would probably take all seventeen years to do it.

So, with those parts omitted, a brief explanation of his current position would be along the lines of "a third-year high school *hikikomori*[109]".

Or, in a little more detail, it would be "a hopeless shit who goes against his parents' expectations and shuts himself in his own shell at a time when exams are coming up".

There were no particular reasons for him to withdraw himself.

One ordinary weekday, the thought just occurred to him that it would be a pain to get up that day, and from there, his absenteeism was under way.

Slipping further and further like this, he took more and more voluntary leaves from school, and, before he knew it, he had become a shut-in who made his parents cry.

[109] Meaning NEET, aka shut-ins that never leave their room.

Day after day, he spent in indulgent slothfulness, cutting off all communication, submerging himself in the Internet——

Subaru: “In the end, I got summoned to a parallel world… huh.”

???: “Subaru?”

While he was busy muttering to himself and trying hard to organize some understanding of the current situation, two white hands grabbed onto Subaru’s cheeks. Looking up, in front of his eyes, there was the beautiful silver-haired girl who had done so.

——Honestly, a very beautiful girl.

With long silver hair that gleamed like the moonlight and amethyst eyes like embedded gemstones.

Her long lashes were trembling as she gazed at him with a worried gaze that took her beauty beyond the natural order of the world, such that it gave him the illusion that he was seeing some divine art-piece magnificent enough to make all the artists of the world give up their brushes.

And then, there was the question, why would such a beautiful girl be squeezing his face in a close enough range that they could feel each other’s breaths, letting out a “Hmm”? Her smell was super nice.

???: “Subaru?”

Subaru: “Ha, yes, I’m Natsuki Subaru.”

His name being called once again by that voice like the ring of a silver chime, Subaru spasmed out a tense smile in reply.

Not just his face, but even his voice was quaking, and it wasn’t entirely clear whether that could be called a smile. And, for reasons Subaru could not understand, this girl seemed to be especially close to him. Otherwise, she wouldn’t be talking and staring at him in such a super-close distance like this.

???: “Umm, Subaru… everything alright? Sorry, but… you’re acting a little strange.”

Subaru: “S-strange…? What, like my eyes, or something like that?”

???: “Uhhh, not that. Your eyes are still reaaally scary-looking like usual, I guess it’s nothing.”

Subaru: “My eyes are usually reaaally scary-looking!?”

Trying to calm himself down by joking around a bit, he instead got hit by that totally unexpected comment. Watching Subaru recoil from that remark, the gorgeous girl stuck out her tongue a little with “You’re always like this”.

So cute. What’s going on with this girl? Why does she seem so terribly close to me?

And just, what did she mean by “always like this”, and acting so worried——

???: “——Emilia, you might have come to that conclusion too rashly, in fact. Something does seem off, I suppose.”

???: “——? But, Subaru’s eyes just always look like that, I think.”

???: “I’m not talking about Subaru’s scary eyes right now, in fact! I don’t really care if his eyes look scary, I suppose!”

Subaru: “What’s with this about my eyes being scary-looking! It’s a bad hobby to be picking on other people’s weak points, you know! What’s with you people… Ah, no, I mean, you two are, kinda cute and all…”

Propping himself up with great force, Subaru started blowing up in front of the beautiful girl and the one she was talking to—— a little girl cute and fairy-like, dressed in an extravagant dress, sporting a pair of no-less-elegant swirling drill-curls. But his voice quickly trailed off.

Inherently blunt, he had started blurting this out without thinking, before he realized that on the other end were a beautiful woman and a beautiful little girl he had just met. Shutting himself up, now serious, he recognized that he shouldn’t have snapped.

——The situation was too strange.

If what Subaru had imagined was correct, these two girls must be important *juuyou jinbutsu*[110]. Something above the villagers of the first village or anything of the sort.

So, Subaru should straighten himself up and focus on first impressions.

Subaru: "Ahem."

Coughing once, intending to start over, Subaru turned to face the two in front of him.

Taking the two shocked-looking girls and the giant black lizard curled up behind his back into his gaze, Subaru took a step back, and,

Subaru: "——Let me introduce myself again. My name is Natsuki Subaru!"

Nioudachininaru[111] by jabbing a finger toward the ceiling, he held his waist with the other hand. Sadly, there was no shiny reflective ball or disco music, but Subaru sparkled his teeth as he said this and tried to make the most of it[112].

Subaru: "Shamefully ignorant, blown here by the immortal winds of gods and demons! An uncouth vagrant, but nonetheless pleased to meet thee!"

??? & ???: "————"

Listening to him proclaiming this at the top of his voice, for a moment, the other two could only stare at him stupidly.

Getting no reaction at all, Subaru only continued maintaining his pose until there was a reaction. As if whoever moved first would lose, he decided he was in it to win it.

And so, after about ten seconds had passed in silence, the two girls looked at each other, and then,

[110] Engrish flip. Means "key figure" (重要人物), originally "キーパーソン" (key persons).

[111] Engrish flip. Means "to strike a bold pose" (仁王立ちになる), originally "ポージング" (posing).

[112] For those unaware, the pose Subaru has liked to bust out since the start of the story is a reference to the 1977 film Saturday Night Fever, starring John Travolta (see the poster here).

「――改めまして自己紹介をば。俺の名前はナツキ・スバル！」
ビシッと指を天井に突きつけ、反対の手を腰に当てながらポージング。
「無知蒙昧にして、天馬不滅の風来坊！不束者ですが、どうぞよろしくよしなに！」
「今さらすぎる自己紹介だったのよ」
「ええっと……別に知ってる、わよね？」
「あれー!?」

???: “Well… but we already know you… right?”

???: “This is way too late for self-introductions, in fact.”

Subaru: “Uwaaah!?”

And just like that, yanked out of his high-spirited self-introduction, his thoughts spilled out into that groan.

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——It was only a little later when the seriousness of the situation became apparent.

He was rather proud of that self-introduction, but seeing the way it was received, Subaru couldn’t help but bend his neck. But, after hearing about the situation again from the two girls, it was clear why they had been so surprised.

Subaru and the girls’ memories were different—— while Subaru was supposed to be meeting them for the first time, they already knew who Subaru was.

Of course, there were no such memories on Subaru’s side. So then——

???: “In other words, Subaru… you don’t remember anything? About this Tower, about what happened in Pristella… and, even, about Ram, and Beatrice… and about me too?”

Subaru: “Ummm… yeah, that, seems to be, yes.”

???: “————”

Seeing Subaru with his knees neatly folded and stuttering out his reply, the beautiful girl widened her eyes. The sight of her pupils violently trembling sent a sense of intense guilt into Subaru’s heart.

But she was not the only one who was shocked by Subaru’s reply.

???: “Your memories… are gone? No way, there’s no way that could happen…”

Muttering this in a whisper, was the pale-faced little girl.

Even more confused than the pretty girl, the younger girl had not been spared from the shock.

As Subaru sat on the side of the bed of ivy, the little girl, sitting beside him, was softly tugging on his sleeve. Seeing her delicate fingers lightly trembling, Subaru's heart ached.

Subaru: "————"

Facing the two girls, shocked and lost in front of him, Subaru attempted to think of something to say, but unfortunately, nothing came to him. Honestly, so much cold water had been dumped on him at once that it would have been enough for him to drown in it.

——Initially, what Subaru thought had happened to him had been "just getting summoned to a parallel world".

While getting summoned to a parallel world, even with "just" attached to it, was already far beyond what would be considered common sense, it turned out to be even further away from it than he had imagined—— although, it could be said that he had almost reached the correct answer.

As far as Subaru was concerned, this was not the familiar world he had lived in for seventeen years.

It was clearly evident just by looking at the outlandish clothing, and the inhuman beauty of these two girls. If that still was not enough, the giant black lizard the size of a horse should also be submitted to the court as evidence.

He had heard of Komodo dragons that were supposed to be pretty big, but that would be nothing compared to the stature of this black lizard. And with the bed and chairs made out of ivy added to that, there was a pretty clear case on hand.

——In other words, this was a world outside all common sense. An alternate, parallel world.

Belonging in the so-called fantasy genre, it was a world wholly unknown to Subaru.

Then the next question would be, why had Subaru been summoned here, and who had been the caster to summon him.

At first, he thought it would have been the two girls in front of him, since that was just how stories usually panned out, and he figured they were probably the main heroines here—— but following that train of thought would be a little strange.

As previously mentioned, the girls knew Subaru, yet Subaru had no memory of this. Their understandings were at odds.

Subaru: “Then I’ve met them already, but I just forgot about it… that’s…”

Trying to process the new information from their latest exchange, Subaru made a difficult face.

At the very least, Subaru’s *ishinouryoku*[113] was already quite overloaded once it dawned on him that he had been summoned to a parallel world. Subaru’s plate was really in no condition to understand that he had actually been active in this parallel world for quite some time before this.

Frankly, Subaru would’ve been more inclined to say something like “Is that even possible?”, and laugh the matter off.

But the beautiful woman and girl seemed dead-serious, and did not appear to be lying, either. Of course, Subaru had no memories of the things these girls were talking about, and he would have stubbornly denied them, if only he did not feel so guilty about the look on these girls’ faces.

In fact, if he had to pick between his own opinions or the girls’, he would probably believe the girls, since he was not even close to trusting himself enough.

Of course, that was not his single reason—— A stronger clue would be the changes to his body.

Subaru: “…Yeah, this doesn’t seem to be the same body I came out of the convenience store with.”

Mumbling this, Subaru held up his right arm and opened and closed his fist.

It might have been psychological, but his arm felt a little stronger than before. And on his palm, there seemed to be a few more calluses than he recalled. These were not calluses made from swinging bamboo swords; because, after all, he had not practiced with bamboo swords for over a year now.

[113] Engrish flip. Means “mental capacity” (意思能力), originally “キャパシティ” (capacity).

Also, those were not the only changes to his arm.

Subaru: “Gross…”

Turning his arm over, Subaru frowned up his face upon laying eyes on its backhand side.

His arm not only felt slightly stronger, but its appearance had become grotesque as well. From his right elbow, all the way up to his wrist, there was a long pattern of black spots—— they bulged out like veins and covered over his arm like a tattoo someone with rather bad taste might have gotten.

If it did not appear to be so organic, it might have been mistaken for a tattoo, but no matter how he picked at it, it was just a part of his arm. Undeniably grotesque.

??? & ???: “————”

So he scratched at the black spot pattern even harder.

When tracing it with his fingers, the texture felt no different from his skin. It did not hurt on its own, and there was no sort of strange numbness either. And, by digging his nails into it, the corresponding sharp pain came just as he would expect.

If he scratched to his heart’s content, he wondered if the black skin would break and bleed.

——And if it did bleed, would the blood be red?

???: “Subaru…”

Subaru: “Huh! No no, nothing? I just, thought my arm got sunburnt to *kongari*[114] and was a little bothered by it. That’s all.”

Although he was a bit shocked by the change, when he heard the pretty girl’s worried call, he immediately tried glossing it over with a joke.

One could say it was fortunate, but Subaru was bit someone who balked at the sight of wounds on his own body. It was not that he would not feel guilty about damaging the body his parents had bestowed

[114] Engrish flip. Means “well-done” (こんがり), originally “ウェルダン” (well-done).

him with, but even without this, his sense of guilt towards his parents was already piling on over and over at this point.

Still, this was a pretty wide area. If he wore long sleeves and perhaps some gloves, he could probably keep it from offending anyone else. Much better.

Subaru: “I usually wear long sleeves anyway, and it’s not illegal to equip some fingerless gloves too. If I ever get into a dangerous situation, I can just yank off the glove and show them the black arm… and they’ll be like, «No way, that guy’s got Black Arm…!». Isn’t that just exciting to think about?”

??? & ???: “————”

Subaru licked his parched lips and swooshed his arm around like crazy.

Considering the changes to his arm, as well the strangeness of the whole situation, the believability of the girls’ explanations was very high.

In the first place, Subaru’s most recent memory was “immediately after shopping at the convenience store”.

Subaru was definitely wearing his jersey when he finished shopping, but, right now, far from his favorite old jersey, he was wearing some sort of dirty worn-out travelling clothes. Nor was he wearing sneakers on his feet, and his *kongari* over-sunburnt arm was not holding a shopping bag either.

Indeed, he had not only jumped worlds, but had leaped through time as well.

Coming out of the convenience store, the moment he blinked his eyes, he woke up here—— that was Subaru’s understanding of it.

If so, then at which moment did he lose consciousness? By the time he realized he was sleeping, he had been woken up by a call. So then, what was up with the blank void before this?

——He was summoned to a parallel world from outside the convenience store, and after some time had passed, he lost his memories.

“Summoned to a parallel world”, sounded like the unraveling of a dream he had dreamt who knows how many times before—— yet he could not simply be pleased to accept this terrible, unexpected gift.

Unbeknownst to Subaru, Subaru had lived for a time in this parallel world, and it was a fact that over that time, Subaru had interacted with and gotten know these girls he did not recognize.

Would it really be alright to believe them, believe in their good will, and stay here with them?

??? & ???: "————"

Subaru: "Ah, ahhhhhhhh, uhhhhhhhh, that, that's right! I can understand why you're feeling down, but I'll just say one thing, let's get our spirits up!"

After thinking long and hard about it, Subaru suddenly puffed up with spirit and shouted that out of the blue.

Beside him and in front of him, the downcast expressions on the two girls sent his heart into a passionate boil.

Without a doubt, they were confused and heartbroken about this situation. While it was still a bit hard for Subaru to accept that he was the primary cause of this, he knew he was the only person who could fix it.

So, extending out a hand to each of the astonished girls in a deliberately flashy gesture,

Subaru: "As far as I know, these cases of temporary amnesia usually get better due to some sudden plot development so there's no need to be too worried. If it's anything like in movies, it usually gets resolved in one or two hours and then everything goes back to normal for some cliched happy ending. Tragedy is the best *yakumi*[115] to lead up to grand happy endings, after all!"

???: "Sorry, I've got no idea what you're talking about."

Subaru: "Ohhhh, kay…?"

???: "But…"

[115] Engrish flip. Means "meaning" (薬味), originally "スパイス" (spice).

Immediately after Subaru laid down his rapid-fire delivery full of bravado, the beautiful girl informed him that she did not understand any of that. Subaru felt like deflating at those words, but the girl quickly shook her head.

And then, lightly scratching the corner of her eye, with a sudden smile,

??: “Subaru is still Subaru, after all… Mhm, I’m relieved.”

Subaru: “Eh. I-is that right? If you say that, then I guess I feel a little bit relieved as well…”

???: “Eiiiiii!”

Subaru: “W-what did you suddenly do that for!?”

With a vigorous cry, the gorgeous girl slammed her palms onto her own cheeks with a force that could not be overlooked. Clapping down with both hands at once, a crisp sound ringing out, the girl’s cheeks turned bright red.

Seeing Subaru thrown into complete disarray at the sight of that gesture, the pretty girl lightly shook her head, and,

???: “There, I got my spirit back. Being like that is no-good, is it? How could we keep making that troubled face when Subaru must be feeling even more troubled than we are.”

Subaru: “She may not look like it, but this girl is crazy ferocious…”

???: “Quick, Beatrice too!”

With her cheeks still bright red, the pretty girl’s dashing declaration stunned Subaru into a state of shock. And then, with the same fervor, the beautiful girl called to the now-petrified cute little girl sitting beside Subaru.

In front of the pretty girl’s intimidating presence, the little girl in a dress shriveled back a bit, but,

???: “I’m shocked too, and I also understand the sadness… but right now, we have to think about the one who’s taking this the hardest. We have to do something for him, don’t we?”

???: “B-Betty is…”

???: “————”

The little girl closed her mouth as if searching for what to say.

Seeing her child-like indecision, the beautiful girl did not speak a thing, and only stared and awaited a response.

She could have continued on and pressured her to change her heart. But the girl did not do this. And the reason, was most likely because she had faith in the little girl.

Unable to remember them, Subaru could not possibly understand the trust that existed between these two.

???: “Subaru… must be very distraught right now, I suppose.”

Subaru: “…Well I, didn’t really, say that?”

Making an ultra-small effort to salvage some dignity, Subaru quibbled. But seeing that the little girl had not been convinced by this, Subaru ended up scratching his head, and,

Subaru: “Ahhhh, honestly, yeah. Yes, I want you to please help me!”

???: “————”

After being pushed into a corner, he admitted to the true state of his mind. Seeing this, the little girl’s eyes widened. In her thin, pale-blue eyes, were a pair of the strangest pupils—— For some reason, they appeared to be the wings of butterflies to Subaru.

???: “…Auuuuggghhh, just, really! Subaru is just the most hopeless Contractor in the world, in fact!”

The next moment, as if those butterfly wings had fluttered up a tornado, the little girl’s attitude took a hundred-eighty-degree turn. Crossing her short arms, the little girl yelled out in an exacerbated voice.

Seeing her like this, the beautiful girl smiled, and Subaru’s shoulders jumped up. And then, pointing a finger directly at Subaru’s nose,

???: “All the time, you’re just throwing up all sorts of trouble to annoy Betty, I suppose! If you don’t stop it with these, these sloppy, irresponsible shenanigans even Betty is not going to love you anymore, in fact!”

Subaru: “Ohh, ohhhhhhhhh… th-then, t-that means?”

???: “But since you’re sincerely begging for Betty’s help, I’ll let this one go, I suppose—— At any rate, without Betty, Subaru will just be a hopeless lonely wimp who can’t go on living, in fact.”

Subaru: “Did you have to put it like that!?”

The incredible rate at which the little girl escalated the conversation knocked Subaru straight into shell-shock. Without this girl, would he really get so lonely that he could not go on living anymore? How exaggerated could it get?

???: “Hmph, even if you tell me you’ve forgotten, I’ll make you remember, I suppose—— Betty’s Contractor is just an annoying, noisy man who, no matter what happens, will never fade to sepia in my reminiscences or anything like that, in fact.”

Subaru: “There was a lot in there I didn’t understand… but was all that supposed to be talking about me!?”

Setting “Contractor”, or whatever words he felt like he could not ignore, aside, the downcast expression on the little girl’s face seemed to have lifted. And so, he decided to resist the urge to object for now.

Frankly, it was still quite difficult for Subaru to just calmly accept the current situation.

The mess in his head had yet to be sorted out, he still had not completely come to terms with reality, and he was unable to exactly swallow all the explanations as fact.

But even so, for now, the girls’ feelings had been conveyed to him.

Subaru: “My name is Natsuki Subaru. I just got here and don’t even know the left from right yet, but I assume we’re probably friends. And I realize this is a bit brazen, but, I’d like to ask you two a favor.”

Jumping up once more, Subaru jabbed a finger toward the ceiling and announced his name.

And then, shooting his arms toward the two girls in front of him, he tilted his head, and,

Subaru: “——Would you mind… telling me your names please?”

??? & ???: “————”

Hearing those words, for some reason, the beautiful girl’s throat froze up, and the little girl blinked her eyes.

But this only lasted for a moment. Then, setting that aside at once, smiles gradually emerged on their faces.

???: “My name is Emilia, just Emilia. Nice to meet you, Subaru.”

???: “Betty is the Great Spirit Beatrice, and Subaru is Betty’s Contractor, in fact.”

And, just like this, they told him their names.

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So, after all that, Subaru managed to complete an event that ought to be labelled as a second first-meeting with Emilia and Beatrice, but——

Everyone: “————”

Over the breakfast table, after explaining the reason why everyone had to reintroduce themselves again, the general mood was like sitting on a mat full of needles.

Naturally, Emilia and Beatrice were present. And aside from those two and himself, there were five other ladies and gentlemen in attendance—— the ratio between gentlemen and ladies was a bit skewed, but at least both genders were represented.

Emilia had explained that they were his companions, having followed Subaru, all currently putting their heads together to capture this Tower—— albeit he hadn’t even realized it was a Tower from the inside.

If he were to describe each of these fabulous members in turn, it would be—— a glamorous woman that was way too sexy-looking, a pretty little girl with a bewitching aura unbefitting of her age, a cute-faced girl with peach-colored hair and an enchanting gaze, an elegant girl with youthful features and a gentle air about her, and, lastly, a handsome young man with upright features surrounded by an air of nobility.

“Everyone is physically attractive”, was Subaru’s miserable realization about this parallel world at this point.

Subaru: “Well… just from personal preference… I still think the beautiful silver-haired Emilia-chan takes first place…”

Everyone: “————”

He whispered that random innutritious thought out loud, and was met with an extremely cold reception in return.

Well, obviously. After all, they’ve just been told that Subaru had lost his memories—— and had forgotten every single one of them. It was inevitable they would be as stumped as Emilia and Beatrice were.

Emilia: “So, I guess everyone is pretty shocked… Subaru is in quite a situation right now. But, even in a situation like this… no, precisely because the situation is like this, we should give him our support.”

Saying this, Emilia pitched in to help Subaru sum up his situation.

Nonetheless, even in the short time that he had gotten to know her, he could already tell that she was not very good at public speaking. It was only when Beatrice spoke her piece that they had been able to wrest control of the conversation which had been going all over the place.

Thanks to that, Subaru’s condition was just barely communicated to everyone present, when——

???: “——Emilia-sama, are you certain?”

Raising her hand, the girl with peach-colored hair asked Emilia for confirmation. Emilia, who was addressed with the respectful “-sama”, nodded “Mhm”, as if it was matter of course.

Emilia: “That girl is Ram. She’s a maid from the mansion… A maid, do you know what that is?”

Subaru: “No problem at all… but, a maid at a mansion, you say. Hmm, I think I got it.”

The pretty peach-color-haired girl named Ram—— according to Emilia’s supplementary information, was apparently a maid. Judging from the fact that she had a maid with her, Subaru could more-or-less imagine what Emilia’s identity might be, while Ram, who could not care less about that train of thought right now, shot a pale-red, piercing glare at Subaru,

Ram: “Is this some kind of prank, Barusu?”

Subaru: “I know I can’t help but come off as suspicious here, but that’s the truth. Also, what’s with turning my name into a blinding curse[116], oy… And, the sleeping girl back there, are you her older sister?”

Ram: “————”

Being addressed with that oafish moniker, Subaru frowned and objected. Hearing this, Ram narrowed her eyes.

His question was about the girl in the green-colored room he had woken up in—— who was not among those present here.

With bright, light-blue hair, and facial features identical to Ram’s—— she was sleeping, and no matter what kind of commotion was being thrown up around her, she went on sleeping as though it had anything to do with her. After introducing himself for the second time, she was the first person Subaru asked Emilia and Beatrice about.

According to them, finding a way to wake her from her unwaking slumber was one of the primary reasons they came to capture this Tower.

Subaru: “Sorry I caused all this trouble when you’re trying to wake up your sister. But I honestly have no idea what’s going on with a lot of things right now. So please insult me all you want once I get my memories back.”

[116] A reference to Hayao Miyazaki’s “Laputa: Castle in the Sky”. Balse/Barusu () is the name of a spell, which causes a member of the cast to go blind.

Ram: "…The way you said that, you really do not remember? That frivolous attitude and tone does not appear to be any different from regular Barusu."

Subaru: "When you put it like that, it almost sounds like I still got all my good qualities from before, which makes me feel a tad better. Well, they say a person's nature doesn't change so easily, so please treat the new me the same way you treated me before!"

Subaru puffed himself up with spirit, and Ram only stared at this irresponsible attitude in disbelief.

Like nothing changed at all. Subaru was so much like his usual self that she could not help but have such doubts. Apart from the memory loss, it was true that it did not seem all that bad.

At least, in terms of interactions, there was no need to worry about anything feeling off.

Subaru: "So that's basi… Uuoouuhh!?"

???: "Master~?"

Just as he had gotten a breather after Ram's questioning, Subaru almost flipped upside down with the feeling of a sweet breath blowing into his ear. Completing his emergency sideways trajectory, he looked back and saw the glamorous black-haired girl standing in a position close enough to lick his left ear.

Sporting a black bikini, hot-pants, and a cloak—— the girl seemed to be aiming for a rather specific fetishism. But, what freaked Subaru out wasn't her clothing, but her movement.

Only a moment ago, she had been sitting cross-legged across from him on the floor. How had she managed to get up and sneak beside him?

Subaru: "Uh, the uhhh…"

Shaula: "It's Shaula! Master's favorite disciple, and the Star-Keeper of this Pleiades Watchtower!"

Subaru: "Star-Keeper…? Also, by Master… you mean me…?"

Shaula: "Yes!"

Beaming a smile that could outshine the sun at Subaru, who was pointing a finger at himself, the beautiful girl—— Shaula, nodded. The sight of that carefree smile completely turned Subaru's impression on its head.

In terms of outer appearance, she seemed to be the girl closest to marriageable age in the group, and, combined with that fashion choice, he originally thought there was an especially mature allure about her. But her attitude was like that of a child. Or rather, like a puppy that was overjoyed to be noticed by its master, or something like that.

In fact, she wasn't too far from Subaru's impression; Shaula was wagging her black ponytail behind her like a dog wagging its tail.

Shaula: "Say, Master… you're still not tired of playing around like this~? Just how many times do you have to forget me before you cut that ouuut?"

Subaru: "It's not like it's a matter of having had enough or not! Actually, are you telling me my memories get lost very often!? Did crossing dimensions make my memories easy to lose or something!?"

Hearing Shaula's air-headed comment, Subaru looked around at the others to make sure.

Although Subaru had been barely able to accept the reality of his memory loss, having it happen frequently was a whole other story. That was not just a predisposition anymore, that would be an actual illness. Were he constantly losing his memories because of some endemic parallel world disease, that would be quite a bit more serious than just making daily life inconvenient.

Subaru: "What is it? Do I really lose my memories that often?"

Beatrice: "No, of course not, calm down, I suppose. Shaula, don't make Subaru more confused than he already is, in fact. He's just finally settled down too…"

Holding Subaru's left hand, Beatrice, who had been sitting beside him all along, sighed. She shot Shaula a piercing stare, and in return, Shaula stuck out her tongue with "Weh~",

Shaula: "I wasn't trying to trouble master, you knooow. Ah, but then, if that makes Master's head get filled with Shaula, then that's ok too, isn't iiit. Ohhh, I'm such a fiendish giiirl. Master, do you like fiendish girls?"

Subaru: “At this point in time, fiendish just means confusing, so no thank you. Right now I only want help from an angel, goddess or fairy, so I’ll leave the half-naked onee-sama type for another occasion.”

Shaula: “Tchiii~, that’s so mean! Even though my boobs are so big, Master’s so mean~.”

In front of Shaula’s ever-escalating affection towards him, Subaru declined her offer with an awkward smile. Honestly, he didn’t dislike her at all, but he could tell that her affection was not directed at the Subaru of this moment, but at the “Master” Subaru of her devotions.

In fact, Emilia and Beatrice’s fondness of him must have been the same as well——

???: “Really, onii-san’s such a headache-san.”

Regardless of Subaru’s inner thoughts, the little girl commented in her sweet voice.

Her appearance was that of a little girl about the same age as Beatrice, but unlike Beatrice’s fairy-like features, her face was still within the realm of human cuteness. Her deep-blue hair was tied in a French braid, a rather unbecoming seductive gaze being emitted from her eyes.

Subaru: “I should like to have a word with your parents, *baby*.”

???: “——It’d be better if you don’t. Onii-san and Momma won’t get along, you know. Also, aren’t we talking about onii-san’s memories right now?”

Subaru: “Even if you say that, there’s no way to get them back right away… For now, your name’s more important. Tell me that, and we’ll have taken the first step in our friendship, you know!”

???: “Pfft… friendship.”

The little girl covered her mouth and quietly snickered at Subaru. He was not sure what was so funny. It was like a snicker somewhere in between mocking and speechlessness, and yet, it was neither of the two.

Subaru could not understand why she was laughing like that, but,

???: “I’m Meili, onii-san. If you haven’t forgotten your sewing skills along with your memories, I still hope you could make me stuffed animals again.”

Subaru: “Ohhh, my hidden power has already been revealed? Sounds like I’m pretty fond of Meili, huh. Are you also kinda a younger sister like Beatrice?”

Beatrice: “That girl was an assassin sent to murder Subaru and Betty, I suppose.”

Subaru: “What kind of joke is that!?”

Beatrice dumped a rather heavy-weight joke on him, but, for some reason, no one else was denying it. Unless… Subaru looked at Meili, and she gave him a little smile and waved her hand.

Subaru had no idea what actually happened, but this little girl being an assassin—— still sounded a bit unrealistic. Although, maybe it would not hurt to stay on the safe side.

Subaru: “So then, Ram and Shaula and Meili have all introduced themselves. Then the next would be…”

Setting his various questions about Meili aside for now, Subaru turned his sights on the remaining two people—— to the light-purple-haired girl in a scarf, and the handsome-featured youth.

Of all those present, only these two had yet to utter a single word since Subaru’s situation had been explained. And, to Subaru, with the gender ratio excessively tilted towards females, that youth was the only person of the same gender as him. So he was quite looking forward to what he had to say, but,

???: “_____”

The silent youth’s yellow eyes were trembling, and a ghastly aura was emanating from him as he sat there. It was an atmosphere that made one hesitate to speak to him, and Subaru could not speak easily as well.

Even for Subaru, who was universally recognized for his inability to read the mood, seeing the youth like this made him reluctant to put a foot forward.

Perhaps, out of all the people in this room, he was the one whom this had hit the hardest.

???: “Just…”

???: “…Hm.”

???: “Just, give him some time to compose himself. That should be fine, no?”

In that youth’s stead, it was the pretty girl in a scarf who spoke, lightly raising her hand. Her clothing seemed to be quite a bit warmer than the others, and, contrary to her cute appearance, her tone was a tad tomboyish—— the so-called *bokukko*[117] atmosphere breaching. And just like this, she sliced through the congealing atmosphere.

Either way, her words had salvaged the conversation. Although, for some reason, Emilia and everyone else seemed terribly confused about something just now.

Subaru: “Ahh, yeah, of course. It’s my bad for suddenly shocking everyone with this…”

???: “The way I see it, it’s not only that…”

Subaru: “Ohhhh, it’s a *bokukko*?”

So this girl who gave off the impression of a *bokukko*, actually did refer to herself with “*boku*”.

With a thoughtful expression, the girl fiddled with her scarf and smiled bitterly at Subaru’s words,

???: “For now, you may call me Anastasia. In fact, were it not for your shocking revelation, it would have been me in your position, making a shocking revelation of my own. But it seems, there has been a mix-up.”

Subaru: “A shocking revelation, huh?”

Unsure what kind of revelation she was planning to make, Subaru seemed perplexed by her words, but Anastasia only lightly smiled, and did not answer him. All the while, watching their exchange, the expressions on Emilia and Beatrice’s faces also seemed as though they were puzzled by something.

They did not know what Anastasia was going to confess either—— but there appeared to be something else that was bothering them.

[117] A girl that uses the pronoun “boku” (ボク), which is primarily used by boys and young men. Most are tomboys or completely unaware of social norms.

Ram: “In any case, it seems Knight Julius needs some time to settle down… so let’s prepare breakfast in the meantime. Emilia-sama, may I borrow Barusu to fetch some water with me?”

Subaru: “Eh?”

Standing up from her seat, Ram patted her knees as she said this.

Her dislike of the stagnancy of the situation, it was encouraging that she’d suggested making use of the time. It made rational sense, yet something about it felt off as Emilia’s face seemed surprised by this unexpected request.

No matter what, to ask an amnesiac Subaru to accompany her in getting water would just be——

Emilia: “Subaru’s memories are muddled up, maybe it’s better to let him rest…”

Ram: “Even if we let him rest, there is no way for him to recover his memories right away. Barusu said this himself. Besides, whether he has his memories or not, Barusu is still a servant under Roswaal-sama’s employment. He is just a bit more forgetful than usual, to use that as an excuse for slacking off is unforgivable.”

Subaru: “That’s pretty harsh, Ram-chan… Ram-san?”

Ram: “————”

She shot him a glare, and Subaru’s shoulders shrunk and shriveled.

Even so, perhaps Ram was right. Although Subaru was currently in a difficult situation, he wouldn’t feel comfortable being overly pampered because of it. Besides——

Subaru: “————”

Watching the downcast youth supported by Anastasia, Subaru felt that he should not be at this place, at least until the youth had settled down.

Or maybe it was because she noticed this, that she wanted to bring Subaru out of the room.

Subaru: “If that’s the case, I shouldn’t underestimate you, Ram…”

Ram: "…Anyways, let's go, Barusu. I do not expect other capabilities from you, but at least you should have no problem drawing water."

Emilia: "Oh, then we could…"

Ram: "If Barusu is too spoiled, it will not do him any good."

Perhaps calling her name without any suffixes was the correct answer, since this time Ram did not object. Instead, she stopped Emilia, who wanted to come along.

Just as Emilia was about to argue, Subaru cut in with "It's fine, it's fine.",

Subaru: "Ram's got a point. Aside from what's in my brain, my body is fine, and I heard that I'm supposed to be a servant? Like a scullery boy? Seems like it I guess, so in that case I should go draw some water and resume my duties."

Emilia: "…Subaru ,you're not a servant, you're my…"

Subaru: "I'm your, what? ——! Unless uh, I… I'm, your l-l-l… l-l… l-lover or…"

Emilia: "No, no, it's absolutely totally not that at all."

Subaru: "It's absolutely totally not that at all!? Well, yeah I guess…"

Breathing heavily through his nostrils, asking this full of hope, he had been immediately shot down by Emilia.

She was definitely his type all the way, but this highborn flower was too far out of his reach. Memories or not, how could Subaru possibly hope to come within reach of such lovely petals?

Subaru: "Anyways, don't mind me, go take care of your end. Hopefully by the time I come back, he'll feel a little better…"

Emilia: "…Mhm, you're right. I understand. I'll try to talk to him somehow."

Putting jokes aside, Subaru lowered his voice and whispered this to Emilia while pointing in the direction of the young man. The youth seemed to be exchanging words with Anastasia, but for some reason, he did not appear to be feeling any better.

It would be great if Emilia and Beatrice could better his mood even slightly.

Somehow, he felt that he should not expect Shaula or Meili to be of much help in the matter.

Subaru: “By all means, I’m counting on Betty. I’ll leave it to you, Contract-ko.”

Beatrice: “——I’d prefer if you don’t call me that, in fact.”

Subaru: “——? Aw, really? Then, just Beatrice?”

Beatrice: “…That’s, good enough for now, I suppose. Subaru can leave it to Betty, in fact.”

Still holding his hand, Beatrice slightly objected to what Subaru called her. Seeing her reaction, Subaru got the feeling that he had made the wrong choice in the end, but still did not know how to fix it.

Then, Beatrice let go of Subaru’s hand so he could go fetch water, and turned her eyes toward Ram,

Beatrice: “Older of the sisters, I’ll entrust Subaru to you, I suppose.”

Ram: “Understood, but we are not going far; I doubt it will be dangerous.”

Beatrice: “It was precisely in that kind of un-dangerous place that Subaru lost all his memories, in fact.”

Ram: “Good point.”

Subaru: “Ughhh, can’t argue with that at all…”

Listening to the exchange between Beatrice and Ram, Subaru was stuck with this unpleasant consensus. Just then, Emilia brought back a water bucket from the edge of the room.

Handing the bucket to Subaru,

Emilia: “Just go slowly with Ram and take your time. I’ll try my best to calm him down before you get back.”

Subaru: “Ah, alright, do your best. I’ll leave it to you, Emilia-chan.”

Emilia: “——Mhm.”

For just a moment, there was a pause before she replied, but Subaru did not pursue it. Having been beckoned by Ram to hurry up with a “Barusu”, Subaru took the bucket in one hand and followed her out of the room. As he left, he stole a glance in the direction of the youth, but he still appeared to not be ready for conversation.

Subaru: “…So, uh, would it be alright if I ask what’s that all about?”

Ram: “You mean Knight Julius? That is quite cruel of you, Barusu.”

Subaru: “It’s, cruel…?”

Now only the two of them, while walking down the hallway side by side with Ram, Subaru asked about the youth in that room, who seemed to have been so shocked to the point of speechlessness.

Ram reply was that he was cruel, and he had picked up that the youth’s name was Julius, a name that gave off quite a smart impression, he thought.

Subaru: “I guess we can leave him to Emilia and Beatrice, that’s why you brought me out here, isn’t it? It wasn’t just to fetch water, right?”

Having put a little distance between the room and themselves, Subaru got straight to the point with Ram.

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “Not talking, huh. I mean, I’m not saying that for sure, I could be wrong and it could turn out to be really super embarrassing for me maybe.”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “…Unless, it was really just to get water? Um, uh, if that’s the case please forget what I said, uhh, now that I think about it, all that smug-faced «something must be up?» was just totally cringey right now.”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “Ah?”

Thinking he had probably gotten it wrong, Subaru’s face was starting to tense up from the lack of a response. But, just as he was trying to find some way to smooth it over, Ram stopped in her tracks suddenly.

Going ahead for two extra steps before realizing that she had stopped, Subaru stopped as well and turned around towards Ram. She lightly brushed her peach-colored hair, and,

Ram: “——Enough, you may drop the tedious act now, Barusu.”

Then, with a slight tinge of anger in her crimson pupils, she spoke.

Subaru: “Eh? The act…?”

Ram: “That was the whole point of changing locations, you understand that, don’t you? You did not have to make a girl so embarrassed, disgusting.”

Subaru: “Disgusting!”

Not understanding what she was trying to say, Subaru furrowed his brows. But in the meantime, Ram hugged her own elbows, and shook her head at his stupid-looking expression.

Ram: “Anyways, since this is Barusu, he must have come up some kind of half-assed plan again. Never mind the indiscrete Emilia-sama, the opposing faction Anastasia-sama, and the untrustworthy Shaula… At least tell Ram what you are up to.”

——That way, in case of emergency it will be easier to coordinate.

With that as the subtext, Ram plainly said this to Subaru.

Receiving this, Subaru’s eyes drifted for a bit, before bringing up his sable right arm and scratching hard at his black hair.

Subaru: “About that, uhh. Ram, what you said just now. It’s not that I don’t understand, but…”

Ram: “But?”

Subaru: “Sorry, but, this is really not an act nor a prank nor anything. I really don’t remember. Sorry I can’t live up to your expectations.”

Ram: “Stubborn. Barusu always likes to go at it alone, but this time it concerns me as well. Ram has a stake in what happens to Rem. So I am afraid you have to let me in on this.”

Subaru: “No, but I mean…”

Who was being stubborn here; Subaru felt himself at a loss with Ram insisting like this.

No doubt she could not accept the fact that he had lost his memories, but Subaru was at a complete loss seeing her so obstinate. In the end, how would pretending to lose his memories help capture this Tower, anyway?

Ram: “Even though Ram does not understand… If it’s Barusu, Barusu always has a plan. So, come clean with me. I will keep it secret.”

Subaru: “Although sharing a secret just between the two of us sounds enticing and all…”

She had no awareness of the details, but she was certain Subaru had a plan.

The way Ram had stated so had brought him such surprise that he stood there stunned for a moment. But even if she questioned him with this flimsy logic, Subaru was unknowledgeable on how to reply.

Come to think of it, she had said “If it’s Subaru”; just how much faith did she have in him?

But, while Subaru was busy being occupied with these thoughts, Ram——

Ram: “Barusu.”

Subaru: “Hm…? Eh, oy!?”

Suddenly taking a step forward, Ram closed in and swung her arm, sending the bucket in Subaru’s left hand flying. Metal struck upon the stone floor, the high-pitched noise echoing down the hallway.

Shocked, Subaru was about to raise his voice to ask her why she did that. But——

Subaru: “Uh, ugh.”

A hand clenched onto his collar, and by the time he noticed he had lost his footing, he was already pinned against the wall.

Letting out a small cry at the pain of his back striking against the wall, Subaru realized it was because of the petite girl in front of him.

He belatedly realized it, but he did not know what was the point of it.

Subaru: “What, what’re you doing…”

Ram: “Tell me. If you do not cut this out, Ram also has some other ideas.”

Subaru: “——Tch! The hell are you talking about! Didn’t I tell you I got nothing!? I’m not lying to you! I…”

Faced with her quiet threat and use of violence, even Subaru’s patience had reached its limit. How many times did he have to say it before she believed him?

Just like this, he tried to grab of Ram’s wrist that was clenching onto his collar, when——

Ram: “——That is enough, spit it all out!!”

Subaru: “————”

Hearing this up-close bark, Subaru’s anger scattered away through his ears.

Perhaps it was the shock—— but it was not only that. There was shock. But after the shock of this sudden scream, he felt her strength falling away.

But, aside from this, there was still something else that stopped Subaru from acting.

Ram: “Spit it, out…”

That voice was trembling terribly.

Hearing this, even without his memories, Subaru nonetheless felt its impact.

The impact was not only because she had betrayed his impression of her, but because of another, indeterminate reason as well.

Ram: “…Please, spit it all, out.”

Subaru: “Ra, m?”

Ram: “…Please.”

Softly, leaning her forehead against Subaru’s chest, the girl spilled this out in a trembling voice. Having entirely lost the force of a moment ago, the only thing that remained was sorrow.

She was not crying. Because she was not so fragile.

She was not grieving. Because she was not so kind to herself.

——Only, held within that voice, was a sorrow that had no place to go.

——To whom, or where, or what was it pointed?

Ram: “If even Barusu has forgotten, then Ram is… then Rem…”

Subaru: “————”

Ram: “Then Rem… she…”

Rem, that was the name of her little sister. Sleeping in a bed in the Green Room, a sleeping princess who looked exactly like her.

That girl, and her older sister in front of him, just what must have happened between Subaru and them? It was not something Subaru could imagine at this moment.

All Subaru knew was that Ram was truly clinging onto something that Subaru had forgotten.

Subaru: “…I’m sorry.”

His arms dropping, watching her as she pressed her forehead against his chest so he could not see her expression, Subaru quietly sent an apology her way.

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Floating (source)

Was it an apology for what he had forgotten, or an apology because he could not answer her?

It was certainly both, and some other emotions mixed in as well.

Ram: “————”

Other than that, Ram did not speak further.

Subaru did not speak any either. Only, feeling Ram grabbing tightly onto his shirt, he closed his eyes.

——Only the bucket that had rolled onto the floor was staring at the two, helplessly leaning against each other.

Arc 6 Chapter 35 – Thin Ice Relations

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 1 "Walking out of a Convenience Store and into a Mysterious World", Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by TranslationChicken (Parts 1 and 2) and Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, Part 3) — Part 1, Part 2, Part 3

???: "——Subaru knows how painful it is to be forgotten. So, forgetting someone, he would never joke about something like that."

Subaru: "————"

On their way back to the room, Subaru inadvertently held his breath when heard the voice from inside.

Even though he was unable to see the speaker, he knew from the voice, beautiful like a silver chime, that it was Emilia. Listening to her say his name in her slightly tense voice, Subaru could not avoid straining his cheeks into an awkward smile.

Carried within that voice was a powerful trust, and an equally powerful plea.

It was from Emilia to "Natsuki Subaru". And certainly not to this "Natsuki Subaru". He acutely understood this now, as he had in the previous exchange[118].

Ram: "…Would never joke about something like that. Yes. Never thought I would say this, but Emilia-sama is right."

[118] An interesting thing here is that the first "Natsuki Subaru", referring to pre-Chapter 33 Subaru, is written in Katakana (ナツキ・スバル), while the second "Natsuki Subaru" is written in Kanji (菜月・昴). An addition to this observation is that throughout Subaru's First Trial in Sanctuary, Subaru's name is often written in Kanji compared to Katakana, contrary to what happens everywhere else in the story.

Also hearing that voice, Ram, who accompanied Subaru, whispered this self-derisive comment under her breath. Unlike Subaru, who was carrying the water-filled bucket, she was empty-handed and holding her elbows, her nails digging into her white skin.

Almost like a reminder to herself, a regret, and an extension of the pain of an unfulfillable vow.

Subaru: “Ram…”

Ram: “It was just a pointless joke, forget you ever heard it. It will only worry Emilia-sama if you bring it up. So, for the sake of Ram’s impeccable reputation, keep it to yourself. If you dare mention it…”

Subaru: “————”

Ram: “…It seems you, really don’t remember.”

If he dared mention it, something scary would come to pass. That was probably what she was trying to say. Or perhaps, she had been expecting Subaru to counter with a quip before she did so.

Just like before, when the connection between her and her younger sister had been brought up, he thought he saw a glimpse of disappointment flashing across her pale-red eyes. But that sadness disappeared in an instant.

The fact that she would not let him tell anyone, was it because Ram was too strong for that, or because she was too weak?

He did not know what lay in the depths of her heart.

Only, faintly, on the center of Subaru’s own chest, there was still a lingering trace of where her head had rested.

Ram: “——My apologies for keeping you waiting. We have returned.”

Without giving him any time to think, Ram resumed her steps and headed into the room. That stubborn attitude might just be Ram expressing her insistence on the matter. Seeing this, Subaru had no choice but to respect her feelings and not mention the matter.

When Subaru entered a few steps behind her, a somewhat strained atmosphere spread throughout the room.

But even so, it was still a tad better than immediately after Subaru made his shocking revelation.

As proof of that, after Emilia greeted the returning Subaru with “Thanks for the hard work”, the next voice that followed was——

Julius: “…Earlier, I showed you an unsightly side of me. Would it be fine if we start over?”

Subaru: “Oh, ohh. I’m the one who surprised you with… Ahh, no, I shouldn’t have interrupted you. Please go on.”

Julius: “There is no need to be so restrained. If you are so formal with me, I will not feel at ease.”

Saying this, a faint smile emerged on the purple-haired youth—— Julius’s face.

Earlier, he had been the one who had turned pale at Subaru’s revelation. Subaru was unaware of what Emilia and Beatrice might have told him while Subaru was gone fetching water, but he seemed to have recovered enough strength to speak.

Only, there were still the words Ram said to him in the corridor—— Upon being asked about Julius, she told Subaru that he was too cruel. Just what could she have meant by that?

Julius: “Let us start again, I am Julius Juukulius. This is Anastasia-sama… I serve as her Knight. And you… are like a friend, of sorts.”

Subaru: “I see, nice to meet you… But, why did that last part not feel very confident there?”

Julius: “Unfortunately, we might have had a slightly different understanding of our relationship. I myself think of you as a friend, but as for what you think of me, that is…”

Subaru: “Literally lost to memory, huh.”

Julius: “——That is, quite true.”

Picking up a certain elegance in his words and conduct, Subaru bent his lips.

According to Emilia and the others, this was journey into treacherous environments—— so, naturally, as the only other male member of their company, there must have been considerable trust between them.

But then again, considering Julius's knightly air and their exchange just now, even without memories, Subaru could imagine his previous self having made a terrible first impression.

Emilia: "It's alright, there's no need to worry. Subaru and Julius are reaaally good friends. We were there, so we can all attest to that."

Meili: "That's right, there's no reason to be so worried about this, is there? Knight-onii-san's already got plenty of other problems to worry about."

Watching their exchange, Emilia cut herself in with her hands on her hips, and Meili mockingly concurred with a mischievous look in her eyes.

Whereas Emilia's words were purely out of concern for Subaru and Julius's first meeting, Meili's seemed to be insinuating something entirely different altogether.

Subaru furrowed his brows when he heard this, while Julius nodded as if having understood her meaning.

Julius: "Why, yes. What Meili has said is correct. Subaru, although we do need to discuss what happened to you, it is not the only problem we are presently faced with. In this regard, please allow me to explain."

Ram: "This, would it be related to Anastasia-sama's strange behavior this morning?"

Julius: "…Your observation is correct, Miss Ram."

Ram said this, leaning against a wall, and Julius slightly cast down his eyes in reply. Seeing this, Ram narrowed her eyes towards Anastasia, and let out a small sigh.

Ram: "Barusu, give me the water bucket. I will begin preparing the meal."

Subaru: "…Aren't we about to discuss something important?"

Ram: "I will be still in the same room. So I can still hear everything… Working will help take my mind off of things."

Brusquely saying this, Ram snatched the water bucket from Subaru's hand and headed towards the luggage-filled corner of the room. Then, they saw her slender back setting about exactly that task.

Emilia: "Sorry. Ram, she isn't usually like this…"

"Anastasia": "Of course, there is no need to mind. It is understandable that she would feel this way—— Seeing the desired information one could not wait to pull out of another's throat suddenly fly so far away, anyone would feel this way."

Anastasia calmly shook her head to Emilia's apology. And, hearing Anastasia's reply, both Emilia and Beatrice made a difficult expression.

Subaru was not cognizant of what might have crossed their minds—— but the answer to that soon came from Anastasia's own mouth.

"Anastasia": "Now then, even though after all the confusion this morning, I would honestly do not wish to burden you with any more surprises… I do think that keeping it hidden would only sow the seeds for discord down the road. Therefore, if your accepting soils would permit it, allow me to confide something in you."

Beatrice: "…Such a pompous and roundabout manner of speech, in fact. Hurry up and get to the point, I suppose."

"Anastasia": "There is no need to be so frightened, Beatrice—— One could say we are as close as sisters, you and I. In fact, it is just as you guessed."

Beatrice: "————"

Beatrice's cheeks froze at Anastasia's words. Standing beside Subaru, as if naturally seeking something to rely on, the young girl's fingers lightly grasped onto Subaru's sleeve.

Subaru cast her a side glance, and after some hesitation took her hand. The tips of her fingers were faintly quivering from the shock, but soon, the small palm accepted this warmth in turn.

"Anastasia": "…Your relationship with your Contractor is indeed amicable and ideal. I wish I could have had the same perfect relationship with Ana, but unfortunately, it is not going so well."

Emilia: “You’re addressing Anastasia-san like you’re talking about someone else. So that means, you’re…”

“Anastasia”: “Ah, yes, you guessed correctly—— Right now, the consciousness inhabiting this body is not Ana’s. Anastasia Hoshin is sleeping deep inside this body. And the one addressing you now would be something of a deceased ghost that has temporarily taken over this fleshly form.”

Emilia’s breath choked up, and Beatrice held tighter onto Subaru. Julius’s face was covered with pain at her confession, and Meili still looked bored as ever. Only Shaula, sitting cross-legged beside Meili, was completely aloof to the conversation, with her attention solely focused on Ram who was preparing the meal.

With her back turned, no one could make out Ram’s expression as she continued about her work. Lastly, for Subaru——

Subaru: “…What are you guys talking about, I didn’t get any of that.”

Left all the way behind, naturally, he could only make a difficult expression.

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——The body of the girl named Anastasia Hoshin was now dominated by an entirely different existence, while her own consciousness was in deep sleep.

Simply put, that was what Anastasia—— or rather the Spirit by the name of Echidna, had explained.

It seemed that fact had been quite shocking to Emilia and Beatrice, while for Subaru, rather than shock, it only served to exacerbate his confusion.

Subaru barely had any impressions of Anastasia in the first place. And then, being told that the person who had been described as Anastasia upon first meeting was actually someone else,

Subaru: “…I-is that so. That’s, hm. That’s pretty big news, isn’t it?”

He could not exactly give a reaction in a way other than like it was someone else’s affairs.

No doubt, it was only from the reactions of those around him that he figured that this was a pretty serious situation. After all, they had come to this Tower for a reason.

It was in order to find a way to save the sleeping girl, and to help those people struck with some unknown disease, that they came here—— Or at least, that was what he had been told.

Ram: “We barely just got here and the key people are already falling apart… Barusu dropped his memories somewhere, and Anastasia-sama’s consciousness is deep in the abyss…”

Subaru: “Ugh, doesn’t look good at all, huh…”

Listening to Ram’s blunt remark, Subaru dejectedly held his head.

The problems were just piling up—— Subaru had not even sorted out his own mess, and more difficulties just kept coming. They were going nowhere. In that case——

Emilia: “Everyone, I think even if we hang our heads like this, we won’t solve anything. I understand the frustration, I do… but, we can’t let our spirits down.”

Everyone: “————”

Emilia: “A lot of people’s hopes are riding on us coming to this Tower. What happened to Subaru and Anastasia-san, that’s a big deal. But…”

Emilia stopped her words, clapped her hands together and gathered everyone’s attention to herself.

Then, after pausing a beat, she scanned her amethyst eyes over everyone present,

Emilia: “We can’t stop here—— We must not give up, that’s what I’ve always been taught.”

Emilia said this firmly as she looked at each member’s face in turn. Her gaze lastly fell on Subaru, who held his breath as he was pierced by their amethyst charm.

Naturally, his chest heated up. He did not know what to say. But he could see the expectation in her eyes. Receiving it, and feeling like he must do something, Subaru tightened his fist.

Beatrice: “Ow! That hurts, in fact! Hey, Subaru!”

Subaru: “Ah, my ba… No, not bad! Because this is proof of my determination!”

Beatrice: “Even if you say that with a straight face it still hurt when it hurt, I suppose! Reflect on your actions now, in fact!”

Subaru: “S-sorry. Hurting you was my bad. But my determination was not! Yeah, that’s right!”

Subaru apologized to Beatrice’s protests that her delicate wrist was being squished, but he quickly shook his head.

He could see that the situation was worrying. But simply worrying about unsolvable problems would not make progress at all. Subaru knew this from personal experience, in fact.

If Subaru were alone, he would certainly have lost his way. But, he was not alone. Even if he had forgotten everything on his end, Emilia and the others were still there for him to call upon. And so——

Subaru: “It’s true, my memories slipping away all of a sudden has caused you a lot of trouble, I’m sorry about that, but that doesn’t mean it’s hopeless. Think of it another way. Who knows, maybe now I’m freed from the unnecessary fetters and ready to burst out with new ideas like a fresh spring or something. Then that might give us a clue on how to break out of this mess, doesn’t it?”

“Anastasia”: “…That’s, quite a progressive take on it.”

Subaru: “Would you rather go backwards instead? All the important things are ahead of us. They say the Goddess of Fortune only shows her bangs, you know? Besides, when it comes to capturing this Tower, maybe we’ll need to come up with a more flexible idea. One that isn’t confined by the conventions of this world, like, an idea from another world!”

Anastasia wryly smiled at that momentous remark—— or rather, Echidna was pushed back by an even more momentous retort. Even though he was just bluffing, what he said was right, and there was a need to break out of the current atmosphere.

Listening to Subaru’s thoughts, the difficult expressions on everyone’s faces began to change.

Emilia: “…Mhm, that’s right. Subaru has always gotten over all sorts of trouble like this. So, this time, he’ll definitely get us through it too.”

Subaru: “Ohhhh! That’s the spirit! Though that kinda sounds like I’ll have to do all the work here, but since you’re counting on me, I’ll do my best. Such a cute girl is cheering me on, after all!”

Emilia: “Thank you, Subaru—— Mm, I’m glad. Subaru is still Subaru, after all.”

Subaru: “————”

Hearing Emilia’s whisper as she put a hand to her ample chest in relief, Subaru was almost caught off-guard.

——Subaru is still Subaru, after all.

Hearing her sigh of relief from the bottom of her heart, Subaru felt relieved as well.

He thought that it was alright. Little-by-little, this self would be able to fill the hole left by the Natsuki Subaru she knew. If he could do just that, then he should be able to smooth over all the jumbled relationships here.

Julius: “…Well well, that sure is optimistic.”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Just when Subaru was relieved by Emilia’s words, Julius suddenly interrupted. Sensing Subaru’s gaze, he shrugged, and loosened his lips with “Nothing”,

Julius: “I just thought, memories or not, it is still as impossible as ever to tell whether you are brave or reckless. On the other hand, perhaps you would only think this because you have forgotten the enormity of the obstacle we are facing.”

Subaru: “Hey, why’s there always some sarcastic attitude from you? Unless… No way, is that just your true nature? Julius-san… I mean, just Julius.”

Julius: “…I see. It’s just as Emilia-sama said, memories or not really does not matter. One’s nature is not so easy changed.”

Subaru: “I guess I can kind of imagine what kind of relationship we had now. We must be more comfortable with each other than anything else, huh.”

They were not harsh words of malice, but an exchange of friendly jabs. Nevertheless, Subaru was convinced that there had been a certain sense of distance between them.

His initial impression had not been erroneous. Subaru and Julius must not have liked each other very much on first meeting. But afterwards, through various things they had experienced together, their relationship must have improved to the point where they could travel to this Tower together——

Subaru: “Then I’ll be counting on you, Julius. Until I get my memories back, I’ll trouble you for a little longer.”

Julius: “Yeah, it cannot be helped. Then I will resignedly accept this as my duty—— Memories are just a trivial matter. I see… that’s right.”

Julius quietly nodded to Subaru’s friendly address, and the topic ended there.

His memories had been lost, and problems just kept coming. This definitely was not a situation one would greet with a sunny disposition, that was fact, but to face it nonetheless was a testament to his strength.

Julius: “When the person in question is not all that concerned, perhaps that is a grace as well.”

Subaru: “I just don’t show it, there’s actually a whole storm churning in my chest right now. But, I’ll take the opportunity to get healed by some alone-time with Emilia-chan later.”

Emilia: “——? You want a lap pillow?”

Subaru: “Ah, uhm, no. I’m sorry. Isn’t that uh… a bit rushed?”

After saying so with his chest pumped up and bright mood, Subaru suddenly shrunk. Not expecting Emilia to be so willing to give him such tender healing, his heart started cowering in fear.

Moreover, it would be a lap pillow. Naturally, his gaze fell onto her soft-looking white thighs——

Ram: “It’s ready. Come help carry it, Pervusu.”

Subaru: “Ouch!?”

Feeling something kick the back of his knees, Subaru let out a wail on the spot and collapsed to the floor. All the while, Ram looked down on him with a look of disdain, as if chastising him for his indecency.

Ram: “Your useless positivity is one of your only virtues, Barusu. Use that positivity to set up the food. As well as for cleaning, tidying, and various other chores.”

Subaru: “That’s, just because Ram wants to slack off…”

Shaula: “Ohh! Master, I’ll help as well! F-o-o-d! F-o-o-d!”

Subaru’s protests regarding Ram’s forceful transfer of responsibilities were immediately drowned by Shaula’s pressing desire for sustenance. Seeing Shaula beginning to carry out the plates, Subaru had no choice but to join in the preparations.

Subaru: “Let’s see the menu… that kinda just looks like preserved rations.”

Ram: “In fact, they are precisely preserved rations. The few fresh foods Emilia-sama brought over have already ran out. So the diet will be quite bland in the foreseeable future.”

Subaru: “Well, hopefully we can capture this Tower quickly and get back to somewhere more populated.”

He had heard someone say that people’s hearts would only be at ease once ample food and clothing were available. In that sense, he was unsure just how well they could live in this Tower.

Particularly in regards to food, with his memory absent, Subaru’s only impression of this parallel world’s cuisine was the taste of preserved rations. Which was rather miserable.

???: “Sorry to bring this up while you are eating, but there is something I want to confirm with you, Natsuki-kun.”

Subaru: “Hungry, hungry… What, me? Something you wanted to ask me?”

Roleplaying as someone who has been treated like a slave and given nothing but miserable scraps ever since he was summoned to this parallel world, Subaru protested against the injustice. But he stopped eating upon hearing Echidna’s words.

“Anastasia”: “It is nothing, but while I apologize for bringing this up this when everyone is united in facing our situation positively, I would like Natsuki-kun to share a bit more with us about what happened to him. After all, your memories were the only ones that has been affected by this Tower. Conversely, who knows if the same thing might happen to any of our memories as well?”

Subaru: “Right, makes sense. Even though having the person involved do it might be a bit difficult, amnesia can be pretty inconvenient, you know.”

Beatrice: “The way you said it make me wonder if you really see yourself as being involved, I suppose…”

Seeing Subaru nod in agreement, Beatrice could only manage a baffled expression.

However, Echidna’s concerns were reasonable. And truth was that Subaru also needed to know how he lost his memories. The clues to restoring his memories must be tied to how he had lost them in the first place.

Subaru: “————”

At the table, to Subaru’s right was Beatrice, and to his left was Emilia. Those two were at his side when he woke up—— he wanted to know just what kind of memories could have prompted them to sit there of their own accord, and to place in him such baseless trust and warmth.

——Or rather, it was that he needed to remember, because it was his duty.

Subaru: “But still… from what I was told, I woke up without remembering anything… Emilia-chan and everyone, where exactly did you guys find me?”

Emilia: “Well… You were nowhere to be seen in the dragon carriage this morning, and we couldn’t find you either in any of the rooms on the Fourth Floor, so we got pretty worried…”

Subaru’s curiosity was piqued by the expression “dragon carriage”, but he did not open his mouth in fear of interrupting Emilia’s story. Perhaps, it was the lizard in the Green Room—— it had something to do with that ground dragon. They did look like the type you’d see from a horse-drawn cart. He would have to put off his curiosity in wanting to see the real thing though.

Beatrice: “Betty was not at her wit’s end as much as Emilia was, in fact. I was just bothered that I couldn’t figure out where you, my Contractor, was within this strange Tower, I suppose. That’s why I went with her to search around the Tower for you, and after that…”

Subaru: “…And after that?”

Emilia: “We found you collapsed in the white Library on the Third Floor, and then brought you to the Green Room.”

Subaru breathed out a “Ahh”, after hearing Emilia and Beatrice’s joint explanation.

Julius: “The Third Floor is one of the many floors within this Tower. We are presently on the Fourth Floor. We are going through them trying to reach the First Floor, which is the top-most floor. That we have already made it past the Third Floor… was thanks to none other than your knowledge.”

Subaru: “Thanks for explaining… Thanks to my knowledge, you say?”

Julius filled in for the missing details. Even so, for Subaru, the contents seemed to be quite lacking in credibility. Nevertheless, in reply to Subaru’s reaction, Emilia continued where he’d left off with an “Yeah.”

Emilia: “That’s really how it happened. All we heard was gibberish, but you were able to solve it all by yourself Subaru… you were reaaally amazing.”

Subaru: “Hahaha, thank you… Hey, no one says «gibberish» these days anymore.”

Emilia: “————”

Subaru: “Did I say something weird?”

Though Subaru had tried to awkwardly compliment Emilia, she remained silent as if something was up with her. For a split second, he could see the traces of some strong emotion flicker across her eyes, yet he had no idea what it meant.

At any rate, he could not keep up with them, as if they were ripples rippling through a pond.

Subaru: “By the way, you said that I collapsed and that you brought me to that grassy room…”

Beatrice: “That room is protected by a special Spirit. That Spirit has the power to heal people’s wounds… That is why we’ve laid Rem down there too, in fact.”

Subaru: “Okay, okay, gotcha. So, that’s why you also brought me there… By the way, what are the chances that I lost my memories due to that room?”

Emilia: “Well, umm…”

Subaru batted one of his eyes shut as Emilia faltered in response, looking like she had not thought of that.

Though this was only a hunch of his, regarding the intentions of this Spirit or whatever, while those may be unknown, if it took the form of a plant, then he could not discount it having some kind of cruel nature.

Flowers were pretty and filled with sweet nectar to get insects to carry their pollen. But they could also be like carnivorous plants who camouflaged themselves to snare in insects to slurp the life out of them.

It could have slurped his memories out of him instead of healing him—— there was a chance of that.

“Anastasia”: “It is quite the wild idea, but I heavily doubt that. In that case, something weird would have happened to me first far quicker, considering I have been in that room far longer than you have.”

Subaru: “…That something strange hasn’t got anything to do with the original body’s owner not waking up?”

“Anastasia”: “Regarding Ana, that happened before we came to the Tower. Her condition has nothing to do with the Green Room. And also, that is correct… the ground dragon in the room has not forgotten about you, correct?”

Subaru: “Huh?”

“Anastasia”: “That ground dragon is awfully attached to you. Suppose, for argument’s sake, that the Spirit in the room had a bad habit of slurping out people’s memories, don’t you think she would have probably given you the cold shoulder?”

Following Echidna’s words, Subaru recalled the ground dragon that had nestled up to him just after he had woken up from slumber.

For sure that ground dragon had been extremely friendly towards him. If the reason behind that was because she had originally been his ground dragon, then that made complete sense. Though, what she had stated also surprised him.

Subaru: “That Ground dragon is a she…?”

“Anastasia”: “Let’s get back on topic. The chances of that room working such wickedness on you are not high at all. As far as I am concerned, it is the room you collapsed in that is far more of a problem. All of you said he came to in the Library of Taygeta on the Third Floor, right?”

Emilia: “Yeah, that’s right. Subaru was collapsed on the white floor, in that room…”

As she reflected on that moment, Emilia gripped her wrist tightly.

Emilia: “I carried you to that room all in a rush, and then tried to go call everyone, but…”

Beatrice: “Subaru woke up during that time and found himself in this condition, in fact. Therefore, it would be difficult to imagine that the Green Room did this, even timewise, I suppose… It happened in that Library, as I thought.”

If something had happened, then this Library or whatever was the source behind it.

It seemed like they had reached a common point of view, but Subaru did not really get it. Perhaps because it was hard for him to imagine what kind of room this division they called a Library really was.

Subaru: “Erm, Taygeta? What kind of room is this Library of Taygeta? The name sounds somewhat familiar…”

Julius: “That Library is a room containing the Books of the Dead.”

Subaru: “The Books of the Dead… Hey, that also sounds like some chuuni[119] schtick.”

[119] “Chuuni”, also known as “chuunibyou” (中二病), or literally translated as “middle two disease” or, alternatively, “middle-school second-year disease”. Well-known term to describe kids in middle school who have delusions of grandeur, like special powers. It even has its own Wikipedia page!

Shelving aside his interest for the name “Taygeta”, Subaru sunk his teeth into the use of the term “Books of the Dead”. Seeing his reaction, Julius gave a curt nod and then continued to speak, saying “We have no concrete confirmation…”,

Julius: “But in this Library, there are myriads of books bearing the names of people from all around the world who are now deceased. To read the books, you must be qualified to do so. It is most likely the kind of thing where you can only read the books about the deceased you had some connection with.”

Subaru: “Again with the bad taste… What is written in those books?”

Julius: “The life of the respective deceased, more or less. Intense thoughts swoop through your mind, as if they were being scorched in. It is really not a matter you want to put yourself through over and over deliberately.”

There was a weight to Julius’s words in his explanation, which could only have been expressed by one who had personally experienced this sensation.

It seemed to Subaru that the memories of the dead were not something he wanted to have scorched into his mind. To put it frankly, experiencing this sort of shock was not something he was keen to do. Then, if he had collapsed in a Library where such experiences were possible——

Subaru: “Was I reading one of those books too when I collapsed? No way, so could something like that have damaged my mind?”

“Anastasia”: “I cannot completely rule out the possibility. About that, Sage, what do you think?”

Shaula: “…Are you perhaps talking to meee?”

While nodding at Subaru’s guess, Echidna turned to face Shaula with a meaningful look in her eyes. As well as that meaningful look, Sage was a really disproportionate way of referring to her.

Were he to speak without restraint, Shaula looked like the furthest thing from a Sage in this room.

Shaula: “No matter how many times you say that my answer’s not changing! I don’t know anything about the Tower, except its ruuuuules! I was just told to be strict with rulebreakers. No matter what Master does in the Tower, I ain’t got nothing to do with it!”

Subaru: “I don’t know why Shaula’s calling me something like Master in the first place, but…”

Ram: “Be relieved. Barusu’s response is the same as before his memories were lost. You are just using this without saying anything because it is convenient for you… So gross.”

Subaru: “You can’t just jump to such a convenient conclusion!”

Faced with Shaula’s gaze, Subaru couldn’t help but express his bewilderment, which with no word of exaggeration showed a MAX level of affection.

Sure, it might be nice to get close with such a glamorous beauty when he thought about it ordinarily, but not knowing where her favor was coming from only created more confusion in him.

Besides, her affection and favor made him feel strangely uneasy. It was something fundamentally different to the sincere feelings Emilia and Beatrice showed him.

Though he didn’t know currently whether this was a harmful effect of his memories being gone.

Subaru: “In any case, that Library you mentioned feels suspicious. If you’re saying there might be clues in there that will get my memories back, then I reckon it’s worthwhile going there to check.”

Julius: “Yes, we should. Our situation is one that even in the best of times we have had one problem after the other. The problems that plague us have seldom been few. Besides, with the circumstances becoming like this, you must honestly realize…”

Subaru: “Realize what?”

Julius: “——Just how much you have been making up for us.”

With his eye still closed, Subaru let out a small snort at Julius’s words. His laugh hadn’t been out of awkwardness, but a strained one that came from deep within how he felt. They were really overestimating him. Armageddon must be nigh, for them to be relying so much on Natsuki Subaru.

Bad things came in threes, and once again Subaru had been made aware of how much of a hindrance he was, a trait he had averted his eyes to; it was as if he were saying, “You have become a considerable burden”.

Subaru: “Anyways, I’d like to go to the Library after we finish eating and if the memories I lost are scattered about there, then I’d like to go pick them up and stuff them back in my mind.”

Emilia: “Geez, that’s an odd way of putting it… It’s so just like Subaru.”

Subaru: “I’m guessing the way you’re saying it’s just like me isn’t really a compliment, right!?”

Emilia gave the flustered Subaru a small smile as she said that. The atmosphere around the place relaxed just a tad as he received it.

They’d come up with a plan and it felt like they were, in true sense, moving forward a bit.

“Anastasia”: “I am sorry to interrupt you when the mood’s like this, but there’s just one more thing I want to inquiry Natsuki-kun with.”

Subaru: “Well, you can go on ahead now that you’ve said this much. What is it?”

“Anastasia”: “Well, this is merely a curiosity of mine which is not at all related to your memories, or capturing the Tower, but despite that…”

Echidna began to stroke her wavy hair, and with an adorable look on her face, compounded by a look of deep intelligence in her turquoise eyes, she asked.

“Anastasia”: “What does that term you speak quite often of, «parallel world», mean?”

Arc 6 Chapter 36 – A Place of Relief

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 1 “Walking out of a Convenience Store and into a Mysterious World”, Parts 6 (from half-way onwards, first half of the WN Chapter was skipped)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——*What does that term, «parallel world», mean?*

Subaru: “————”

Subaru felt as if his breath had been knocked out of him as he heard Echidna’s question, sinking into silence as a result.

During that time, the gazes of everyone in the room turned towards him. Although the emotions varied across everyone’s faces, what was most common was the emotion dubbed “doubt”.

Everyone was treating the term “parallel world” as something of an unknown.

In other words, that meant the Natsuki Subaru before losing his memories had never bothered to explain it to them.

Emilia: “Parallel world… Come to think of it, Subaru used to say that before from time to time.”

Ram: “It does ring a bell. Though from the way he acts like on a daily basis, I had not paid any attention to that kind of nonsense.”

Subaru: “Putting Emilia-chan aside, it’s incredible how indifferent Ram acts towards me…”

She came as a stark contrast to Emilia, who was adorably immersed deep in thought, a finger of her brushed against her lip.

Ram had coldly snorted out a “Ha” in response to Subaru’s wry-faced remark. However, their initial surprise had been softened thanks to having left this *one cushion* behind.

The previous Subaru had never bothered to speak up about the “parallel world”, not to Emilia or Ram, nor even to any of the others whom he’d supposedly adventured together with. He did not know for sure what that meant, but——

Subaru: “Were there some kind of restrictions to it? When I was sent to this world, was I sworn by a God or Goddess into not speaking about it, or the like… And first things first, what kind of mission am I here for?”

He cocked his head, however, not even the “M” of the mission he had been entrusted with came to mind.

Presumably, Subaru had been summoned into this parallel world by someone working behind the scenes that had some expectation of him.

By Subaru’s reckoning currently, the likelihood of this someone being sort of like a god was very high.

This god or whatever that he did not remember had given him some kind of role and sent him to this parallel world—— Thinking about it, this was the sort of promise one would find with these parallel world thingamajigs.

So, if losing his memories was something that this god found inconvenient, he could hopefully expect some follow-up to improve his situation. Subaru wanted to believe this god was not the cruel sort who would just throw him into this fantasy world without giving him some generous benefits. Or perhaps——

Subaru: “——I’d better find out if it’s actually something I can’t touch on, huh.”

Beatrice: “Subaru?”

Subaru licked his parched lips and searched for a response for this situation. He winked at Beatrice, who was looking at him with unease, having caught ear of his muttering. He decided that he would address the question that had been posed to him—— about this “parallel world”.

Even if by some chance speaking about it was forbidden by this godly being, it was difficult to imagine there would be some sort of drastic penalty that he could not recover from, were he to touch this taboo.

Surely, as soon as he would have spoken of the taboo, there would not be anything drastic that would happen, such as being assailed by unbearable pain.

With a little bit of anxiety, Subaru gently got his breathing under control. And——

Subaru: "Well about this parallel world, I spoke of, the word itself is written as per «different» and «world»[120]… In other words, I mean that the place we're in right now is a separate world."

Emilia: "In a separate world, a «parallel world»…"

Subaru: "Uh. That's why I say «parallel world», yet…"

Following Subaru's explanation, Emilia mulled over what he'd said, rolling the words out on her tongue. She wasn't the only one to react like this—— the others in the room were also pondering over that word.

As it was from the pronunciation, "isekai", they had received the word itself much like an unknown[121].

Though he had presumed that from how low their comprehension of the expression "parallel world" was, apparently, it seemed like the idea of a different world was not a common one in this world.

Coincident with that, Subaru slapped his body to check for any changes.

Subaru: "…Nothing seems to have happened to me."

Putting it into words, Subaru ensured that nothing untoward had happened to him.

As far as he could tell right now, there were no signs of any abnormalities having occurred. There was neither pain nor numbness. Nor was there a strange voice sadly addressing him with "You have violated

[120] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "It's hard to convey the meaning in English here, when he tries to explain what the word «isekai» means, due to language limitation. To explain it best, in this sentence essentially Subaru takes the word «isekai», and splits it up into «異なる», meaning «to differ», pronounced «kotonaru», and «世界», meaning «world», pronounced «sekai». The cast doesn't know what the word «isekai» actually means in Japanese. The closest thing that could be done is making them confused on what a «parallel world» is, which also keeps consistent with TranslationChicken's translation of the word. Realizing this makes the exchange make a bit more sense in English.

[121] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "«Isekai» has been localized as «parallel world» for this entire chapter, as that's how it's typically translated. However, in this case, it really cannot be avoided writing it out in Japanese, so the above sentence makes sense. Just keep in mind for the whole chapter to be honest that «parallel world» is the same as «isekai»".

your instructions" or the people in his surroundings transforming into a flock of cranes, saying, "I did tell you to not to do that".[122]

He had managed to deal with all the worries he'd had without any issues arising.

Subaru: "This isn't what I expected…"

Certainly, he had thought that he hadn't talked about the parallel world due to having some kind of reason; however, nothing really came to his mind for something that he'd get caught up in, regarding this matter.

Subaru cocked his head to the side at the sensation of having parried that. Then, Julius raised his hand with an "May I?",

Julius: "I now know what the expression «parallel world» means. I can take it as a term you yourself have coined, but there is a part of me that has thinking about its implication. Why do you reference that parallel world so often?"

Subaru: "Oh? Oh, oh, that's right! Just explaining the meaning of the word «parallel world» isn't much of an explanation. Then, um, in other words…"

Julius: "In other words?"

Following Julius's questioning, Subaru realized he had cut his explanation short. And, clearing his throat he went on to say,

Subaru: "I come from this «parallel world» thing. I wasn't born and raised in this world, I'm some alien who got mixed up into this world halfway through—— That's why for me this place is a parallel world."

——Indeed, now he had clearly explained his position and circumstances.

[122] This is a reference to "Tsugi no Ongaeshi", a story from Japanese folklore. In it, a man saves a crane, and that night, a woman appears at his door claiming to be his wife. One day she tells the man not to come into a room until she is finished. The man does not abide by this, and finds out that the woman is the crane he had saved. Due to him finding her identity, she then turns into a crane and flies away, never to return. For more information, see here.

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——I am someone who came to this world from a parallel world. Nice to meet you.

Roughly speaking, this was what Subaru had told them.

It was easy to imagine Emilia and the others to have been shaken by that bold confession. After all, it must have been a bombshell to them, since they were unaware of the existence of parallel worlds.

It really was no surprise that all the common sense they had up till now had been thrown out of wack, along with the shock they felt along with it, like their world had been turned upside-down.

After finishing his confession, Subaru took note of their concerns, and cursed his own heedlessness.

If he had made Emilia and Beatrice feel as if they had been engulfed by a maelstrom of confusion, if he had made them do something like grieve, then he was responsible for having brought that about.

How would he comfort such beautiful girls if they were to break down into tears? He had no experience with this.

So, with a few seconds passing, feeling these anxieties, Subaru turned his eyes towards them.

He had imagined that he would find them looking pale, blood drained from their visage, with confusion etched on their faces. However——

Emilia: “…Uh, so you mean you’re from beyond the Great Waterfall?”

Subaru: “Eh? The Great Waterfall?”

Subaru’s eyes widened at Emilia, who had timidly asked this question whilst frowning in thought.

They were words he had not come across before—— “Waterfall”, he thought must have been a cascade or something, but this Great Waterfall must be a big version of one. Perhaps he could think of it as a huge cascade.

——Actually, no, what sort of connection did this big cascade have with the parallel world in the first place[123].

Subaru: “No, definitely not. Nothing to do with waterfalls. I’m talking about a world that’s completely different from this place and what your common knowledge is and stuff…”

Ram: “So, then you are from beyond the Great Waterfall. How do they call it in your hometown, Barusu… Actually, no, I guess it is probably the other way around, given that it would be your hometown. The countries here surrounded by the Great Waterfall would be a «parallel world». Your wild behavior makes sense to me now as well.”

“Anastasia”: “That is correct. That must be the reason why I could not find anything no matter how much I investigated Natsuki-kun’s origins; because he is from beyond the Great Waterfall.”

Subaru: “Well, hey, hey, how are you all so quickly convinced with that!?”

It wasn’t just Emilia who had agreed with this conclusion; even Ram and Echidna, who both appeared to be quite intelligent, had agreed with it.

For Subaru, their levels of belief towards this mysterious waterfall were nigh-incomprehensible. The thought that there was a parallel world beyond a Great Waterfall—— on the other side of a waterfall, where the heck was this tunneled wonderland?

Beatrice: “You may have no idea about it considering you’ve forgotten so much, in fact. But regarding the Great Waterfall… It’s at the far reaches of the world, and there are a few stories left behind from people coming from beyond it, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I do quite like the sound of that… at the far reaches of the world.”

Beatrice: “The Great Waterfall is said to be impossible to cross over, with the exception of Dragons[124]. It’s the border between here and there. There’s no one who knows what is on the other side of it… So,

[123] This is a tad changed from Witch Cult Translations’ original, where Great Cascade is preferred instead of Great Waterfall, but as the latter is the community’s preferred term, we’ll be going with that. Using Witch Cult Translations’ original translation note here, “瀑布” (translated as “waterfall”) is a less common of referring to a waterfall, so Subaru muses it must be a “滝” (translated as “cascade”), hence the waterfall vs cascade wordplay here.

[124] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Could also be «the dragon» instead of «dragons». Japanese doesn’t distinguish between that.”

on the rare occasion that someone crosses over from that world, no one holds any basis to deny the words they spoke as lies or falsehoods, I suppose."

Beatrice explained it for him, on the basis of the assent of the people listening in, who were showing their acceptance for it.

The contents were iffy, there were some things that were difficult to imagine for Subaru with him not being an expert in the circumstances of this world. However, thinking about the term "Great Waterfall" and its present explanation now——

Subaru: "So this place feels like a floating continent, and there's something like being unable to cross over to another continent without a dragon?"

Ram: "Haa."

Subaru: "Quit with those horribly disgruntled sighs there. You're gonna hurt my feelings."

Ram looked at Subaru, who'd been trying to justify it as best as he could, with a sense of staggering disappointment.

However, the others also seemed to be regarding Subaru's talk the same way, pretty much. In the end, his floating continent theory was likely incorrect.

Subaru: "If I'm off-base, then I'm off-base, I get it.… But I was sort of hoping to have a great Eureka moment riding on dragonback, if my theory now had been correct."

Meili: "If you keep talking about it like that, onii-san's adorable ground dragon is gonna start sulking, isn't sheee~."

Subaru: "Ah, yeah. That black ground dragon is mine right. Let me have a ride on her later."

Shaula: "I'm gonna be as weeell! I'm gonna be sulking too! Master, I think you should take better care of meeee, and appreciate me better and loooove me more~. Now that you have lost your memories, let our relationship *saihossoku*[125]! From zerooooo!"

[125] Engrish flip. Means "restart" (再発足), originally "リスタート" (restart).

Subaru: “You’re noisy, and damn clingy! Also, don’t be so quick to poke fun at me losing my memories like you’re talking about someone else!”

Shaula noisily joined in the conversation, with Meili sitting clutching her own knees.

Though Shaula had intruded rather brusquely and said that, that was something which Subaru now was actually really grateful for—— of course, fretting too much about it was tough.

Subaru: “————”

From there, Subaru shifted his attention with a glance towards his surroundings.

In his original world, though depending on the situation, Subaru had a reputation for not being able to read the mood from the people in his surroundings. However, no matter how unsuited he was at it, if the emotions were strong enough, then they could be easily read or seen.

Not just Emilia and Beatrice, but also Ram, Julius, Anastasia, or rather, Echidna; their expressions were all showing worry towards Subaru.

For better or for worse, before losing his memories, Subaru would have been doing pretty well with the ladies. How enviable. How he would like to be told what kind of magic he had used.

Even if he were, he did not at all believe he could put it into practice now.

Subaru: “Anyways, to sum up everything that’s been said… at the edge of this world there’s a cascade called the Great Waterfall and occasionally people come from beyond it. And so, you’re saying I’m one of them as well.”

Emilia: “From what I’ve heard from Subaru, I can only assume that’s the case… No?”

Subaru: “Hmmm.”

Subaru exchanged looks with the wondering Emilia, his arms were crossed by his side as he painstakingly hmmed.

To be precise, it was not Subaru’s intended course of action to run counter to the general understanding which everyone had of the world. Nonetheless, even if Subaru thought that the parallel world and the

Great Waterfall were unrelated, he knew he wouldn't make any progress in this situation if he continued to talk about it.

Subaru: "Long story short, it's."

Within this world, there was no concept of parallel worlds.

He didn't know whether this "beyond the Great Waterfall", as Emilia and the others recognized it, suggested the existence of yet another world, or the world Subaru was in. In actuality, there may be other continent-like stuff across the Waterfall, and from there, there may be records left behind of a figure like Columbus who made it there, taking him as a "weirdo".

If so, he could safely say that a correct understanding of parallel worlds for them, was already a lost cause.

Subaru: "By the way, did I never mention anything about parallel worlds, back when I had my memories?"

Emilia: "Thinking back to then, once in a while you'd make some mention to the term «parallel world»… but this is the first time we have really talked properly about it."

Beatrice: "Same as Emilia, in fact."

The others affirmed the answer to his question with gestures whereas Emilia and Beatrice with words.

The prior Subaru had not told them about parallel worlds. Perhaps, he'd deemed that they would not make heads or tails out of it, if he'd spoken about it like he had now. Or——

Subaru: "——Because I had been stopping myself from talking about it, huh."

Julius: "Subaru?"

Subaru: "Huh. Uh, no, nothing. Hey, if I'm not the only so-called parallel world-er there's been, then do you know anyone else? A person from the other side of the Great Waterfall, or a drifter, whichever."

Perhaps there were a lot of people drifting in from different worlds; maybe there was a community of sorts where such people gathered.

However, Subaru's hopes were denied by a shake of the head from Julius.

Julius: "Sorry, the existence of a drifter, as you call it, is very rare. Most people who claim they are from beyond the Great Waterfall are lying. What they say are generally pipe dreams or fabrications, some of them set their sights on trying to extort people out of money whereas others are simply trying to influence people of their fanciful beliefs."

Subaru: "Oh, well, yeah, I can see that happening…"

As much as one would like to believe such stories, the majority were the works of fiction or embellished rumors, given that there was no way to make sure. Once one's imagination/creation was set loose with these dreamy stories or ennui tales, they became breeding grounds of reverie.

Even if people who were genuinely from another world like Subaru existed, their words, actions and legacy would be buried under countless falsehoods, rendered impossible to find.

"Anastasia": "——Honestly, my interest in the Great Waterfall is never-ending, but it seems it really has no relevance to our current situation. It would be a good idea to simply end this with establishing that the unknown origin of Natsuki-kun and his knowledge have been settled."

Echidna had broken what had been an awkward silence that had been forming.

Originally, she had been the one asking Subaru about it. Although there were still parts unfamiliar to her and she was most likely unsatisfied, Subaru welcomed her ending the conversation there.

——Besides, the more he talked about his original world, the more he would have to face the problems that he had left behind. That made his heart heavy, and ache.

By concentrating on the state of emergency in front of him, he could try and distract himself from these feelings.

Subaru: "That's it about me. I understand that you all care about me, and love me, but I feel like we aren't going to make any progress talking about this leisurely. Why, first things first…"

He did not know what had directly caused his memory loss.

But, the place where the Subaru with his memories intact had supposedly last ventured—— he wanted to check what had happened there.

Beatrice: “You will want to check the Library of Taygeta, I suppose.”

Subaru nodded at Beatrice who had beaten him to voicing out his thoughts out loud.

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So, with all that said and done, the group headed out towards Taygeta’s Library.

Subaru was feeling quite nervous about what would be awaiting him there; the way there wasn’t free of its troubles though. That was because,

Subaru: “Um, Emilia-chan? Why are you holding my hand so tightly?”

Emilia: “Eh? Well, it’s because I’m worried about leaving you by yourself, Subaru. I need to keep you in arm’s reach… So, I came to conclusion, given that, that it’d be good to hold hands from the get-go.”

Subaru: “I mean, I like the simple, quick nature of that conclusion, but like this, it’s way more embarrassing!”

Subaru lifted the hand that was being held by Emilia, aware that his cheeks were getting flushed.

Her slender, cute fingers were gently holding his hand and he worried about whether his palms were sweating. In reply to Subaru’s words, Emilia raised her eyebrows in a huff and said “Jeez”,

Emilia: “Don’t be like that. Beatrice is also holding your hand, so it’s not just us two together!”

Subaru: “There’s a difference between holding the hands of a child, compared to one of a beautiful woman, like the difference when cold rain is falling again on this day too, or the difference between the heavens and earth, or night and day.”

Emilia: “Sorry, I’ve got no idea what you’re talking about.”

Emilia spared Subaru no quarter, what with him having a record for losing his memories as a result of being left to his own devices, even with all the excuses he was spouting out. Goddamned memories. And him, for having lost them.

Beatrice: “Now, that statement is unpardonable, but it’s as Emilia said, in fact. Subaru ought to follow along obediently and be well cared for by Betty and Emilia, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Oh yeah? This is where we put Beatrice in the middle being sandwiched between Emilia and me holding hands with you from both sides, young couple style! I’d be down for that, but wouldn’t that not be uncool?”

Beatrice: “Subaru isn’t Subaru unless he’s uncool, in fact.”

Subaru: “What kind of assessment is that!?”

He ended up taking that scathing evaluation from Beatrice as well, who was holding his other hand.

Julius, who was leading the way ahead, looked back towards Subaru a few times, and Echidna, who had been following right behind him would explain to them, one-by-one, what lay around each corner.

Ram was sharp-tongued whenever she spoke out; however, Subaru was the only one who knew that, despite her outward appearance, she was suffering inside. He wondered if he should talk to someone about her, but he did not know who he could possibly talk to regarding Ram’s circumstances.

In a way, it was only Shaula and Meili, who were chatting together with each other at the back of the group, who were mentally soothing for Subaru right now.

Subaru: “Well, they’re not really going to be useful for anything…”

Meili: “…Somehow, it feels that just now wasn’t very polite? Onii-san.”

Shaula: “Master’s mind is always like that. It’d be a waste to dwell on it. You’d be shocked if you all peeked inside, it’s all pink anywaaays, makes me want to pull away. Pink braaain, shaaaameless school~[126].”

Subaru: “Doubt we’d find either shame or schooling in you…”

Shaula: “Master’s doooing. My entire knowledge, Master’s doooing~.”

Mere conversation with her made his head ache.

Whilst they had been exchanging these bouts of conversation, the party had gone up the stairs and arrived at the place called Taygeta, the Third Floor. It was quite expansive, almost as if it transcended time and space.

Subaru: “So this place is Taygeta… There are quite a lot of books in here, just as I’d heard.”

Subaru breathed in awe as he looked around Taygeta, marveling at the sheer number of books there.

Indeed, this was a sight that was beyond anyone’s imagination.

Subaru was quite the avid reader (reading light novels, manga, strategy guides, etc.), but he had never been surrounded by so many books. Naturally, the National Diet Library[127] would probably win, however, only due to the difference in space.

Either way, the meaning behind the picturesque scenery in front of him was not just down to the sheer amount of stuff there——

Subaru: “If Books of the Dead are here… then wouldn’t that mean that there are as many Books here as people who have died… If it has been recording nonstop since the time of the *Homo sapiens*, then there literally must be an overwhelming number of records here.”

[126] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “Shaula is making a reference to this. As for what she means by this reference, no clue”.

[127] The National Diet Library (国立国会図書館 or 国立国会図) is Japan’s national library, similar in purpose to the United States’ Library of Congress.

Subaru did not know the scale of this world, but if the records of the dead were inside books, then the quantity of books would be immeasurable. Even if he tried to find a book of interest—— such as one with the name of a deceased person he knew, he would not be able to physically find it.

Subaru: “In a modern-day library, a lookup function is indispensable… but here?”

Beatrice: “Um, I don’t know what you mean by lookup function or whatever, I suppose. However, there is no one else more similar to a librarian here than Betty, in fact. Got no choice but to start checking, I suppose.”

Subaru: “This is like looking for a one-hundred-yen coin in the middle of a desert…”

Warily, Subaru placed his hand on the spine of a Book.

Pulling the tome from the bookshelf, it easily fit into his hand, and it felt like nothing special when looked at. There was nothing especially particular about it, it was just a plain old book. There was no design to it on the cover, other than its title. In all, it could be mundanely described as being a very plain book. When it came to the issues he had with it——

Subaru: “Damn it! I can’t read the title.”

The title was written in illegible squiggly characters.

From what he had heard from Emilia and the others, the title of the book was meant to be the name of someone deceased. If the dead was someone one shared some connection with, then apparently their memories in life could be read; however, Subaru could not even comprehend what the letters meant in the first place—— with his memories now at jeopardy, he doubted that having such connection would even make sense.

Subaru: “Well… this may be difficult…”

Emilia: “SUBARU!”

Subaru, who had been lost in thought, looked around in surprise at hearing an abrupt shout.

In an instant, the Book he had picked up was wrenched from his grasp, and Emilia, the performed of said action, stepped back from him, holding the Book to her chest.

Subaru: “Uh, uhhhh, Emilia-chan?”

Emilia: “Don’t be so careless! Subaru, do you understand? You must have lost your memories here, you get that right?”

Subaru: “No, wow, that’s overblowing it…”

Emilia said that as her complexion changed; to that, Subaru gave a scratch of his cheek, accompanied by a strained smile.

However, it seemed that only Subaru was taking the situation lightly.

Beatrice: “Subaru, listen to Emilia, in fact. Refrain yourself from acting so impulsively, I suppose.”

Julius: “I agree. You should be careful and refrain yourself from performing such a rash action.”

Subaru: “Guh…”

Both Beatrice and Julius had beseeched caution from Subaru, his throat seizing up, unable to reply to either of them.

It was not animosity that welled up in his heart, but rather shame from his awkwardness. Certainly, he may have been acting a little too carelessly.

Shaula: “Pfffft! Master is getting aaangry! You look so sad! Butbut, I don’t mind even if Master’s acting like a pitiable naughty kid!”

Subaru: “Shut up! Don’t poke fun at people who are reflecting on themselves!”

“Anastasia”: “Alright already. It would be a bother to be interrupted like that again. In truth, Natsuki-kun’s actions were a little rash, but… We have also already established that.”

With her hand covering her mouth Shaula was laughing away at Subaru’s mistake. Echidna had forced herself between Subaru and Shaula as the former snapped at the latter.

Then, whilst gently stroking her scarf with her hand, she said,

“Anastasia”: “Natsuki-kun, you were unable to read the title of the Book, is that right?”

Subaru: “——? Oh, yeah, that’s right.”

“Anastasia”: “What you can see here is that losing your memory as he has will interfere with your cognitive abilities—— such as your literacy skills. That is why he was speaking of parallel worlds…”

Beatrice: “Sorry, but Subaru began studying the alphabet when he arrived at Roswaal’s mansion, in fact.”

“Anastasia”: “————”

Echidna, who had tried to speak confidently about it was left dumbfounded by Beatrice’s retort. Not paying any regard to Echidna’s lack of response, Beatrice crossed her small arms.

Beatrice: “Subaru could not read or write I-script until he came to the mansion, I suppose. The elder sister of the two sisters, who served as his instructor, should know about that too, in fact.”

Ram: “Yes, it is exactly as Beatrice-sama says. From the start, Barusu could not read or write, so I dedicated myself to teach him… it seems my efforts were wasted, seeing him in this current state.”

Subaru: “Sorry! I wasn’t aware there had been such an episode!”

Subaru raised his voice in apology in reply to Ram’s resentful complaint. Taking a sidelong glance at the occurring exchange, Echidna cleared her throat.

“Anastasia”: “Ahem, it seems I was way off the mark. You can forget what I said.”

Julius: “No, it is not as off the mark as you may think. At least we have discovered that Subaru’s memories were lost after coming to Lugunica.”

Ram: “In other words, Barusu is just useless baggage that does not serve any purpose in this Library.”

Ram scathingly added to Julius’s confirmation. Subaru remained silent as he did not wish to stir up any more trouble upon himself. However, it was Julius who spoke with a short nod, saying “Miss Ram’s words are correct”,

Julius: “Her manner of saying it aside, that is how it is. In any case, we cannot let Subaru relive what happened the night before. We should be the ones to look for clues in here.”

“Anastasia”: “Yes, that would be safer.”

Ram: “I do not have any objections. Are Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama okay with it?”

Beatrice nodded back towards Ram, saying: “I understand, I suppose”, and Emilia turned towards Subaru, looking at him with quite the serious expression in her eyes.

Emilia: “Subaru, please wait here without doing anything rash… The memories you lost, me and the others… we will find them.”

Subaru: “Oh, okay, okay, understood. It feels annoying not being able to do anything, but I believe in Emilia-chan and everyone else! I will wait here quietly.”

Emilia: “Can you really wait here quietly? You won’t wander off as you please?”

Subaru: “I don’t need reminding! I’ll be fine! I’m not a five-year-old kid, I can wait here quietly. I can promise it if you want.”

Emilia: “So maybe you’re not going to be quiet after all…”

Subaru: “What do you mean!?”

Granted he had brought out that promise to make her feel some peace of mind, however it had ended up in only sowing more mistrust.

Looking around his surroundings, he saw that, Julius and Echidna aside, Beatrice and Ram were merely shrugging their shoulders in reply as if to say “That’s how it is”. In any case——

Emilia: “Subaru is going to quietly wait here at the front, okay?”

In response to Emilia’s sincere appeal, Subaru decided that he would reluctantly wait for them at the front of the Library.

He sat down hugging his knees watching over Emilia and the others who had begun to split into two separate groups to search the Library. In one group were Emilia, Beatrice and Ram, in the other, Julius and Echidna.

Looking on with an air of confusion, it seemed that Emilia and Echidna respectively were leading these uneven teams.

Meili: “Teaming up to search must be sorta like insurance so they don’t end up like onii-san. After all, onii-san’s strong point is that he attracts trouble.”

Subaru: “I may have no memories, but that I have no memories is the issue, so obviously I cannot even answer back to that… No, I don’t want an assassin of all people, to tell me this.”

Meili: “Because I am totally concerned about trifling matters like that…”

Subaru: “I don’t think you can call that a trifling matter!? In the first place…”

After that loud straight-man act, clicking his tongue, Subaru turned to face her.

The voice originated far from the bookshelves Subaru was standing next to, from a girl with hair arranged in a braid leaning against the wall, Meili.

She had a coquettish expression on her face, not at all appropriate for her age, and with a “What?”, she titled her head.

Subaru: “I thought you had joined the search… Are you not going to?”

Meili: “Yeah, I won’t join it, after all, I am not really a proper companion of onii-san and onee-san’s friends.”

Subaru: “Not really a proper companion…”

Meili: “I told you so, didn’t I? I’m an assassin… Well, as I failed my mission it’s more like former assassin. Originally, I was sent here just to help out, not bothered about anything more.”

Subaru: “In other words, I get the feeling like this was your bail condition… Whether a former one or whatever, it’s quite the drastic decision to take to adventure along with an assassin among your compatriots.”

Meili: “——Yeah, that’s exactly right! I suppose there really is something wrong with them.”

Meili giggled and placed her hand on her mouth, drawing that chat to a close.

Subaru snorted at her attitude and——

Subaru: “I get why Meili wouldn’t go with them, but what about you?”

Shaula: “Huh, meee~? I cannot read and write anything, so I am of no use whatsoeveeer. Just like Master, the Books’ contents are all non-sense to meee.”

Shaula was leaning against the wall, on the side opposite from Meili, laughing as she responded. She proceeded to move over and pulled Subaru by his left arm towards her voluptuous body.

Such a soft, warm feeling. Instinctively, he untangled himself from her.

Subaru: “Uwaaah!”

Shaula: “Waaah, Master is such a meeeeany~.”

Subaru: “I’m not a meany, stop that! It’s improper for a girl to have done that… Such things should be reserved only for the guy you like… No, don’t do that because even a guy you like would be turned off if you came at him like that so abruptly. You’re doing yourself absolutely no good by behaving like this.”

Shaula: “Boooooo. Talking about a girl’s sense of dignity again? Master seriously never changeees[128].”

Shaula pouted at Subaru as she protested against his attitude. However, hearing her words had made Subaru look down in embarrassment.

Shaula: “Master?”

Subaru: “You think I haven’t changed as well?”

Subaru blurted this out to Shaula almost instinctively.

[128] The way Shaula said “Master seriously never changes” is, in its original form, “お師様、マジ変わんない”, read “oshi-sama maji kawannai”, which sounds very similar to Subaru's own “Emilia-tan maji X” (EMX) pattern.

He had heard this phrase, that he had not changed, several times over the course of the few hours he had been awake. It had seemed like a salvation to him to hear this, but also at the same time, a curse.

——He could be pleased that he had not changed, or he could lament that he had not changed.

Shaula: “Hmm, I’m not so sure.”

Nevertheless, despite such turmoil brewing inside Subaru, Shaula had said that so readily.

Subaru was, as expected, astonished at her reply. Perhaps it had been a mistake to have let her hear some of his more delicate worries.

Subaru: “You… No, it was idiotic of me to have asked you that.”

Shaula: “Gaaah~. Master is not an idiot! If you’re gonna put it like that, I’m gonna get angry, Master or not! Master is a wonderful person, I want you to be confident in yourself!”

Subaru: “I really don’t understand your position in all of this.”

She would point and laugh at a depressed Subaru, and then get angry when Subaru was self-depreciative. The only thing that stayed consistent was that the topic was him.

Hearing Subaru’s question, Shaula pushed her ample-sized chest forward and smiled with her hands on her hips.

Shaula: “Whether you’ve changed or not, Master is still Master, so I don’t really give a toss! So long as you do as you please, Master, I will always follow you.”

Subaru: “…Even if it results in crazy stuff?”

Shaula: “Well! Even if we end up in strange situations, I can always pry things open by force! Master may have forgotten, but that is the relationship between Master and meeee!”

Subaru: “————”

All her candid words, everything Shaula had said, showing nary a trace of duplicity, or anything like that, struck him they had, many times over, causing Subaru to give a faint gulp.

He turned his face away, so that Shaula would not be able to see it.

Meili: “Onii-san?”

Subaru: “——!”

Seeing Meili looking at him there, he turned his face away back to the opposite side again.

Shaula: “Master, what’s wrong?”

Subaru: “Gah, geez!”

Subaru could not escape to his left, or to his right. He could only kneel down, and look down at the floor holding his head in his arms so nobody would see his face now.

Subaru got the sensation that Meili and Shaula were looking at each other with him curled up in between them.

They would not understand—— No, he wished for them not to understand.

He felt like he had been saved by those vapid, vacuous, gap-filled words. He felt that she had shown that he did not need to get more worked up more eloquently in her attitude than in her words.

Meili: “Onii-san, you’re strange.”

Shaula: “Master was strange from the very beginning, but I love him for that too!”

Subaru had nothing he could say in response to the exchange of those girls, that went way over what he could comprehend.

He merely felt like the feelings of tension rushing through his mind had eased off, if only a tad.

——It was a few minutes before Emilia and the others came back sans results that Subaru somehow warded off his impulses and stood up.

Arc 6 Chapter 37 – A Papier-Mâché's Dream

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 1 "Walking out of a Convenience Store and into a Mysterious World", Parts 7-8

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——The search of the Third Floor Library, Taygeta, had ended with absolutely no results.

Emilia: "I'm sorry… We tried reaaally hard to look for clues…"

Emilia bowed her head in apology towards Subaru after bringing him those fruitless results. Subaru politely accepted the apology; but in all honestly, he wasn't that disappointed.

Of course, it certainly would have been for the best if he could have regained his memories here. Nevertheless, he was lacking in awareness in having lost his memories in the first place, so Subaru did not feel overly emotional that the search party had yielded unsuccessful results.

Shaula: "——? Master, what's up~?"

Subaru: "Huh, oh, it's nothing."

Shaula glanced towards him, cocking her head at him with a happy-go-lucky expression on her face. Subaru shrugged his shoulders, feeling a bit uneasy at the sight of her and her long, jet-black braided hair swinging about.

There was no ill-will, malice, or even any profound meaning to her.

In the end, it meant she wasn't really thinking about anything, but her attitude being like this appeared as a relief to Subaru right now.

At least it was better than having the others always scrutinizing what he did, constantly worrying over him, and watching over every single step of his.

Julius: "Apparently, there does not seem to be a pattern to how the Books are arranged. It is difficult to picture them being ordered following their titles or following chronological order. And on the flipside, Books which we would have found yesterday on one bookshelf cannot be found today on the same one."

Subaru: "So yet another troublesome and unfriendly Library, huh."

Subaru wrinkled his nose at Julius's remarks.

Not only did the Library boast an overwhelming collection of books, but the books happened to move around scrambling themselves on their own accord, giving him absolutely no hope as a library-user.

Even if there happened to be a Book they needed, they would never find it.

Subaru: "Why can't we just pull out each Book one-by-one, and stack them onto the floor? There's no bookshelf at the back, since the bookshelves all go around the room in a circle, but say we pick a starting point and go through them one by one, surely we'll find something somewhere?"

"Anastasia": "In my opinion, it would be wiser to not. Probably doing that would be prohibited by the Tower's rules. It would probably be considered as disrespecting the Library."

Echidna, cocking her head to the side, dismissed Subaru's suggestion. Beatrice crossed her arms and agreed with Echidna with a curt "I suppose".

Beatrice: "Being an experienced librarian Betty could never overlook leaving a book on the floor, in fact. You cannot show such disrespect to books like that, I suppose."

Ram: "Beatrice-sama, I feel like you often left a large number of books stacked up on the floor."

Beatrice: "Those were the ones that instructed me how to correctly arrange the Library, in fact!"

Ram narrowed her pale crimson eyes at Beatrice's awkward excuse, though she didn't bother to reply. She merely let out a deep sigh, to which Beatrice's expression turned to one of shock.

Alongside this librarian talk, Subaru butted in and said "Prohibited?", with a puzzled expression on his face.

Subaru: "I'm sorry, it looks like this is something I've not heard of again… what is prohibited?"

Emilia: "Oh, sorry. Looks like I didn't explain it properly."

Emilia raised one of her fingers in answer to Subaru.

Emilia: "In actual fact, there's a bunch of rules that we can't break in the Tower. Like, such as «Don't leave this Tower until we finish its Examinations», «don't do anything bad to the Library», «don't damage the Tower», those kinds of rules."

Subaru: "I see. Who would have guessed that putting Books on the floor in this Library was a bad thing… By the way, who judges whether we've broken any rules?"

Shaula: "Oh, that's where I come in! Me, the Star-Keeper, will do that! Meaning, if a rule violation happens, I'll kinda end up freaking out and I'll become a cold-blooded *satsujin kikai*[129]! That's why I'd prefer if you did your best not to!"

Subaru: "A cold-blooded *satsujin kikai*… You?"

Subaru could only laugh dubiously at Shaula who had cheerfully lifted her hands up whilst making this proclamation.

No matter how much he believed Shaula's frivolous speech, he thought it unlikely that she could ever transform into a cold-blooded killing machine. In the first place, how much damage could she really do with the slender arms of a woman—— would that even be applicable in a magical fantasy world?

In fact, Subaru had heard that Shaula was not his or Emilia's ally, but rather was the Star-Keeper—— the warden of this Pleiades Watchtower.

[129] Engrish flip. Means "killing machine" (殺人機械), originally "キリングマシーン" (killing machine). As a fun fact, the Japanese expression used here is actually the localization of a music album's title.

She held a non-standard position different from that of Meili, supposedly being was here to aid in advancing the Examinations inside this Tower—— yet he had no such impression of her actually doing this.

Subaru: "If you seriously hold such an important position, you're going to have to let us off the hook for the sake of our friendship."

Shaula: "Oh, you are such a baaaad guy! Master is seriously *kosoku*[130]! But, I can't get enough of that sliiightly wicked side of yours! There's tons and tons of stuff I'd like to hear from you, were it one of your wishes Master, but that is irrelevant to my will! Give up on that hope and show good sportsmanship; act fair and square and give it your all!"

Subaru: "You're no use!"

Shaula: "Ahii."

His strategy of trying to bring the warden to his side ended with unexpected failure, as her authority as a supervisor was too lacking.

At the same time, he had to keep Shaula's forehead away with his finger as she kept trying to bring her face close to his in the middle of the conversation, forcing her charming face back. And while doing that, Subaru let out a feeble sigh.

Emilia: "…It really kinda seems like Subaru and Shaula are both really good friends."

Emilia whispered this just after Subaru had finished talking with Shaula.

Hearing Emilia whisper it to him, Subaru turned to face her and awkwardly stammered a "No, no, no, that isn't so!" to her.

Emilia: "————"

[130] Engrish flip. Means "under-handed" (姑息), originally "ダーティー" (dirty). Additional translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "The way Shaula said Master is quite dirty is «お師様マジダーティー», read «oshi-sama maji daatii», which sounds very similar to Subaru's own EMT or EM? pattern."

His attempt to lighten the mood of the situation was not working; Subaru immediately stopped upon seeing Emilia's expression with eyes downcast.

Emilia was not smiling. Merely, her eyes, framed by her long lashes, were gazing downwards, and wavering within her amethyst eyes, was a seeming sense of loneliness.

Subaru's face sunk at seeing her expression, and immediately noticing his reaction, Emilia frantically waved her hands back and forth at him in denial.

Emilia: "Oh, no, it's reaaaally good that you're both friends! Such a gloomy face does not suit you, Subaru… Yeah, it's okay."

Feigning a smile, Emilia somehow blurted those words out to herself.

Subaru: "Ah, Emilia-chan, you know, I…"

Subaru held his head as he struggled to find anything he could say to say to Emilia.

He felt like he would be saying the wrong thing no matter what he said.

Likely the only way he could find a correct answer would be amidst his vanished memories. He was in a nightmarish situation where all the options presented were probably incorrect answers.

Under these circumstances, saying anything to the sad girl sitting in front of him would be——

???: "Hey, so what are we going to do now?"

A soft voice broke the recently-formed awkward silence.

It had been Meili who had asked this from where she sat on Taygeta's floor, resting her chin in her hands. She looked up at the adults in the room from her seated position and spoke,

Meili: "We can't find any leads to recovering onii-san's memories here. It's a shame, not that I particularly care, but I wonder what we should do next. Are we still trying to find clues on how he lost his memory? Or…?"

Meili cut her words off there; instead turns her face upwards and pointed at the ceiling with her right hand. She was smiling quite provocatively.

Meili: "Let's aim upwards again? Let's postpone finding onii-san's memory for a short while."

"Anastasia": "…Yes, that seems like something to consider as well."

Having heard Meili's suggestion, it was Echidna who responded with a thoughtful look on her face. Emilia's eyes widened at hearing her agreement.

Emilia: "Wait. I feel the same sense of wanting to hasten, but I can't leave Subaru like he is."

"Anastasia": "I understand your view. It would be certainly preferable for me, Julius and everyone to return Natsuki-kun's memory… However, we cannot ignore the current situation either. Natsuki-kun's memories ceasing to exist may be linked to the Tower's Examination."

Emilia: "Subaru's memories are linked to the Examination?"

It was not just Emilia who reacted like this, the others all turned their heads in surprise towards Echidna as she said this. With that situation, Echidna closed one of her eyes and spoke, "May I?",

"Anastasia": "There is no doubt that common sense barely applies when it comes to this Tower, however, it would be foolish to think what happened to Natsuki-kun is unrelated to the Tower. That's why we all went to Taygeta in the first place—— to put it broadly, the current idea is that his memories were taken from him by the Tower."

Subaru: "I think that sounds *chuunibyou* and cool and all, that memories can be stolen by the Tower. If it weren't me experiencing this, I would be excited to hear about that… but, to begin with, Taygeta's Examination has been completed. Wouldn't it be strange that my memories would be removed here?"

"Anastasia": "Yeah. Therefore, I think that your memories were not stolen because of the Examination, but rather because you must have broken one of the rules. Even if the Examination of Taygeta is over, the functions of the Tower have not been entirely fulfilled out. Such as like taking out a Book or disrespecting the Library."

Echidna had explained her reasoning and Subaru puzzled it over, twisting his head and neck. In conclusion, Echidna's reasoning alluded to the following.

Subaru: "So you're saying yesterday I must have broken one of the rules of this place and bam, my head went *kerplow*. To be honest, trying to search for loopholes sounds like something I would do. I'm not able to make any objection to her reasoning."

Emilia: "But, wouldn't that have made Shaula angry?"

Echidna nodded at Subaru acknowledging her conclusion, however Emilia butted in and pointed towards Shaula, clearly remembering their previous interaction.

Emilia: "If he had violated any rules, wouldn't that have made Shaula angry? It should be a completely different story to what we are experiencing here with his memories."

Ram: "That is correct. I understand the possibility that Barusu broke the rules foolishly, but Shaula has not bared her fangs yet at Ram or any of you. What do you make of that?"

Ram glared at Shaula with her cerise eyes. Beholding her gaze, Shaula leapt up with an "Eeep", and hid behind Subaru.

Ram: "No way that you would have seriously abandoned your role because of Barusu?"

Julius: "That is very optimistic of you to say for sure. However, as Miss Shaula said some time ago, she is barely aware of her being the one who actually carries out the punishments in the Tower."

Shrugging his shoulders, Julius stood next to Echidna, supporting her opinion.

Julius: "Four things which are prohibited have been presented to us, but the given penalty for breaking one of them may not be equal for us. Miss Shaula could turn into our enemy and in some cases attack us, for example desecrating the Library in some way could result in having your memories stolen…"

Julius cut his words off there and promptly turned his yellow eyes towards Subaru.

Subaru: "————"

There were some really complex emotions swimming inside Julius's eyes which Subaru could not discern.

However, Julius immediately continued his speech with "Although",

Julius: "We do not have any time or actual proof to test whether this guess is correct."

Ram: "If memory loss is really all there is, then we can just sacrifice the four or five hours of memory that Barusu has had since waking up. That ensures that the damage will be minimal."

Subaru: "Stop using people's memories as guinea pigs! Memories still shape that person! Even if it's only four or five hours, I am still myself! I'm not a bad Natsuki Subaru!"

Ram: "I was joking."

Subaru's entire body shivered at Ram's blunt remark, which had been spoken behind his back.

Whether it had been a joke or not, Subaru had no clue. It was likely it was, dare he say that her lofty attitude was probably just a façade. Even though only a short while had passed since meeting her, it was probably in her nature to wish not to show any weakness to people.

In the end, it would not surprise him if she just wished to erase her embarrassment from the time when Subaru had seen her frail side.

Anyways, whether Echidna and Julius's reasoning was correct or not, that one possibility was worth considering.

Simultaneously, Subaru also had a thought regarding his memory loss. That was——

Subaru: "To put things plainly, both of your opinions, regardless of whether they have a nugget of truth within it, I'm against grasping at straws here. Even if we're like sort of just floundering around, I don't really get the feeling that the memories I lost will be found, you know."

Emilia: "Do you have anything as grounds for thinking so?"

Subaru: "Just a hunch. Besides, if this is really part of the Tower's Examination then maybe if we clear them I'll get my memories back, right?"

Emilia: "————"

Subaru wagged his finger left and right as Emilia and the others exchanged looks in response to his words.

However, they hadn't reacted negatively to his thoughts out of doubt. Rather, there was a trace of hope beginning to appear on their faces.

Firmly, placing her palm on her chest, Emilia began to rapidly nod.

Emilia: "Yes, that's right. If Subaru's memories have been slurped up by the Tower, then surely they may be returned after completing its Examinations."

Subaru: "The expression you used, «being slurped up», I get quite the super-cute feeling from it, but that's the spirit, that's the spirit!"

Emilia: "Mhm, that's the spirit!"

Subaru smiled in relief at Emilia as she had jumped up and made a cute triumphant pose.

Beatrice, who had been looking on, shook her head in exasperation,

Beatrice: "Geez… I really don't understand which one of you is the one being encouraged, in fact."

So, she let that out like that.

Certainly, with this, their positions were opposites—— however, Subaru thought that was fine.

After all, he had found some hope in this situation, and some of the vigor had returned to Emilia's eyes. For that, Subaru had felt quite a great sense of relief.

Such a gloomy face did not suit a young lady like her. Besides, she had been worrying about Subaru from the depths of her heart. It was quite painful to think that he'd been the reason behind making her look so gloomy.

Subaru: "And I was the one who showed such a move on a woman way out of my league…"

Beatrice: "I have no idea what he is saying, but for now we will adjourn finding Subaru's memory, I suppose. So if we are to complete the Tower's Examinations, we should do as Meili suggested and go upstairs, in fact."

Subaru: "Upstairs. So, you said we are on the Third Floor now, so the next floor up is the Second."

As he said that, Subaru looked around the Library. A room that he'd surveyed more than plenty, even without having actually walked around it.

A room with nothing in it except bookshelves. Meaning there were no stairs that led up.

Subaru: "Where's the staircase that leads to the Second Floor?"

Julius: "It is located on the Fourth Floor. There is a staircase there that leads up to the Second Floor from there…"

Emilia sneaked a look towards Julius, with a concern plastered on her face. Seeing her, Julius knitted his eyebrows and said, "Worry not",

Julius: "I will not act rashly without consulting any of you like yesterday. It is as I promised at breakfast. However, even had I not done so…"

Ram: "Reid, the First Generation Sword Saint, is a very powerful opponent. Now then, what do you suppose we should do?"

Julius and Ram exchanged bitter looks. And those that seemed to share this feeling was not limited to just those two; everyone at this place had a similar look on their faces.

Or rather, other than Shaula, who had grimaced like she had put something in her mouth that was not just bitter, but poisonous.

Subaru: "Ah, sorry. What do you mean, Reid?"

As usual, it was Natsuki Subaru that had been left behind in this situation.

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——The First Generation Sword Saint, Reid Astrea.

That was the name of the man who guarded the Second Floor of Pleiades Watchtower as its Examiner.

In the first place, the title of Sword Saint was something Subaru had heard for his first time. However, when he had heard that he was of the First Generation of this lineage, he got the premonition that this man could be likened to a powerful fictional character from his knowledge of these subcultures.

That expectation of his was not betrayed, and in fact these Sword Saints or whatever were extremely powerful people.

It seemed that yesterday, having challenged Reid, the party had experienced a difference in strength between them much alike the difference between an adult and a child.

Amongst them, that only Emilia had achieved some sort of victory through both skill and luck, was a big deal——

Subaru: "The problem is that I've lost my memory and I can't even do anything useful…"

At the breakfast table where everyone had been trying to distract themselves from their uneasiness, he had tried to think of a novel idea to clear the Tower with a bang. As far as he knew the Examination on the Second Floor seemed to require pure strength. In this situation, there was no place at all for his guile or knowledge of the modern world.

Subaru: "I guess scattering some flour about and attacking him with a dust explosion or something like that ain't gonna cut it…"

His strongest signature ability, Dust Explosion; he would need to fine-tune quite a large amount of flour to activate it. In the first place, Subaru did not have the courage to scatter an abundant amount of flour in a situation where food was scarce.

In fact, it was unknown to him whether there was any flour at all here.

Subaru: "Hm, then I hope I can activate the secret *urawaza*[131] ability that I must have gotten from being summoned into this world."

Subaru punched the wall next to him with his palm, yelling out a "Ha!" in an attempt to see if he could activate it. There was no shockwave emitted from his palm, nor had the stone wall he had punched

[131] Engrish flip. Means "(video game) cheat" (裏技), originally "チート" (cheat).

shattered into little pieces. The only thing he felt was the roughness against his palm, and a somewhat hollow pang in his heart.

Unfortunately, the secret cheat ability that had been given to Subaru seemed to not be related to great physical strength.

He placed his hands on the wall and kicked it with all his might. All that resulted was that he had unexpectedly left a footprint on the place he had kicked the wall. As well as a stubbed toe. Off the mark yet again.

Subaru: "Well, it must be magic! Beatrice, tell me how to use some magic."

Beatrice: "Magic, Subaru can never use that ever again, in fact."

Subaru: "Ever again!? Why!? Did I dabble into a forbidden spell or something!?"

Beatrice: "You used too much beginner's magic despite being told not to use it and it broke your Gate, I suppose. That's why Subaru will never be able to use magic again, in fact."

Subaru: "It broke from using beginner's magic!? So lame!"

Subaru had the urge to cry out to the heavens for being an unimaginable failure, having heard that he indeed had possessed magical powers, but could not use them anymore to live life as a mage. And worst of all, it had been the casting of beginner's magic that had destroyed his magical gate.

Regardless of his loss of memories, Natsuki Subaru's life in a different world had started from the very bottom.

Subaru: "Guess at least my saving grace is that I've been blessed with people."

Clenching his hand into a fist, and then unclenching it, Subaru felt these emotions along with a profound sigh.

Even if it was rather one-sided, it was relieving that there were people here who knew him. Without them, he would have been alone in this unknown world without any special abilities. To be honest, he did not think he was skillful enough to survive without any support.

So, finding himself here was a salvation—— Even if it had made someone's face sink.

Subaru: "————"

Gulping, Subaru bent and stretched on the spot.

He had checked the condition of his body, of his magic, and whether he had any special abilities.

They were in some impromptu free time before they went up to the Second Floor. Whilst Emilia and the others were making the arrangements to challenge the wall that was the Second Floor, Subaru was busying himself in checking whether his body had been endowed with any special abilities.

After punching and kicking the wall, after being indignant about being told that his magical ability had ran dry, after running around the Tower's insides, after thinking on how to test for special powers from various directions, Subaru had realized one thing.

That was——

Subaru: "That maybe, I haven't received anything…"

After sprinting through the hallway, whilst slightly out of breath, Subaru had accepted this fact.

He felt like he possessed more physical strength than he did before. Even when he had kicked the wall he felt as if his hips' suppleness was different from what he remembered. However, it was not to be confused for special powers, rather it would be more accurate to say that it was the same consequence of the scars on his body, and his grotesque-looking arm. In other words, it was probably due to what had happened during the year which Subaru could not remember.

The only ability he possessed was the to merely be an ordinary person who could not even respond to his parent's expectations. Something that would have attained after a suitable amount of endeavor.

He could not feel the grace of special abilities granted to him by a so-called "God", there.

Subaru: "At first, I'd tried to do some transformation poses…"

He had tried Super Senshi poses, then Kamen Rider poses, Pretty Cure poses, and even Sailor Senshi poses, but they had all been ineffective.

Meaning that, in the end, he was the type of parallel world visitor who had been thrown in here with nary a thing.

Subaru: "After all of that, my only hope is that my powers awaken when I am in trouble… fuck."

Scratching his head, Subaru bit down the seeds of anxiety that were starting to grow in his heart.

In front of Emilia and the others, he would have steeled himself and pretended that everything was okay, however, when looking at the situation anew, there was nothing but anxiety regarding Subaru's position.

His memory was gone. There was no longer any doubt about it.

There was too much evidence pointing towards it, and to be honest, he really wanted to believe it. He couldn't not believe it and continue to stay in this place.

He wanted to stay here. Here in this world, only here right now. So, he wanted the power to do that.

Subaru: "In the end, I have to depend on the bonds I have made with people I don't remember. Makes me wanna cry."

Natsuki Subaru, who was always mooching off stuff, did not have any changes to him, even in this parallel world.

The more Emilia and the others showed how earnestly they were worried about Subaru, the more Subaru cursed himself for being blessed with his borrowed position.

Subaru: "It's not like I'm gonna be able to do anything at the Second Floor…"

That was why, in his heart, he had refused to be left behind.

After they had explained to him about the guardian of the Second Floor, Reid Astrea, there had been some disagreement among Emilia and the others on whether to bring Subaru along to the Examination.

It had been Emilia who was most concerned about bringing him along, and the others, albeit not as vehemently as Emilia, were a bit reluctant on having Subaru accompany them. Subaru, on the other hand, wished to accompany them. It seemed that they had thought that he would be unlikely to be of

much help to them in conquering the Second Floor, and they had also mentioned that Reid Astrea's temperament would be harmful towards him.

Therefore, had it kept going like that, Subaru was going to be left behind——

Subaru: "——Still, I insisted on going with them."

The reason why they had tried to leave Subaru behind was because they were worried about his body.

Being treated so gently with concern always on their mind felt delightfully poisonous to Subaru, right now. Had he been the Natsuki Subaru with his memories intact, he was sure that he would have accompanied them and that there would never have been such a discussion on whether he was coming or not.

It would be unlikely that his amnesia would influence his abilities. In other words, except for the lack of knowledge, Subaru had thought he would be able perform the same tasks as he did before he lost his memories.

Hence, he had tried one way or another to prove it to them, but in the end he had not achieved any results.

Subaru: "Although I asked Beatrice to leave me alone, from here on out the going's going to get tough."

He recalled the little girl's sullen face in seeing that Subaru was about to be left behind.

However, he had still asked her to leave him be to try to ascertain whether his secret cheat ability was something physical, magical or skill-based. After she'd left, Subaru had tried out the transformation poses.

After all, it would have been extremely embarrassing to test these poses in front of another person. Beatrice of course had been quite unyielding, and Subaru recalled how he had argued back and forth with her.

Beatrice: *"If Subaru is left alone, you're going to end up losing your memories, nothing good will come of it, in fact! Betty will not move from here even with a lever, I suppose!"*

Subaru: "I'm glad you feel that way, I'm totally grateful, but I'm about to do some stuff that I can't show to anyone!"

Beatrice: "Between Betty and Subaru, such distance isn't needed, in fact!"

Subaru: "No, I will be getting naked to put on my getsumei keshou[132]!"

And so, he had tried to break through to her with a brute-force approach, zealously appealing her to leave the room.

Eventually, seeing how nothing was working, they had managed to sort out things, with Beatrice receiving his strong, strong appeal, that he would not do anything unnecessary, and would without fail, join back up with her.

Subaru: "Although it doesn't ring a bell, I was told I was her Contractor, on that point, it seemed like it was going well with Beatrice. Doesn't sound like me… was that actually really me?"

Grimacing a little, Subaru pulled out something from his waist—— the whip that had been holstered there, and lashed it out, attempting to hit the wall with its tip, but instead only succeeded in hitting his own leg.

Subaru: "Oww…! I guess my body doesn't remember how to use it…! Or, maybe I didn't master its use before losing my memory…?"

Having hit his own shin, Subaru's eyes began to tear up in pain as he rubbed it.

In the first place, why had he chosen a whip as his weapon of choice? It was not a sword, or a gun… was he trying to be cool and unique picking a whip as his weapon?

Subaru: "If I'd been able to use it, then I guess it must mean that it's not just the stuff inside of my head that's gone missing?"

While rubbing his shin, Subaru mulled this over as he knelt, his face twisting into a scowl at the chance that it really would not be salvageable.

[132] Engrish flip. Means "moonlight cosmetics" (月明化粧), originally "ムーンライトメイクアップ" (moonlight make-up).

If his current reasoning was indeed correct, what was left for him, here?

He had lost his memories, made those he was supposed to accompany worry, lost everything he had worked towards, and became useless. Ultimately, with only history having been etched onto his body, and merely the outer shell was set in place.

Guess he was just like papier-mâché.

Subaru: "Ha."

With a short sigh, Subaru got up. Those words that were floating in his brain were so silly that he wanted to guffaw at them.

What are you going to do now, you papier-mâché…?

When wasn't Natsuki Subaru a papier-mâché?

Subaru: "Ah, I give up, I give up. I'm an idiot. Maybe I'm just unmotivating myself…"

Subaru brought his fist to his forehead in frustration and sighed again, bending over to pick up the fallen whip. He did not understand how to put it back to how it was—— struggling a bit, he finally managed to somehow put it back on his waist.

As he did so, there he saw a blister on the palm of his hand—— one that was different from those he got from swinging a *kendo* sword, one that made him feel the year that had gone by. For some reason, he traced it with his tongue. It felt tough. It felt bitter.

Subaru: "I wish I'd kept a diary for this occasion. This is no use."

Subaru started to walk away from the scene, fuming at his past self in irrational anger.

He had been unable to confirm the presence of any secret cheat abilities, but in a sense he could say the fact he could not was a trove of information. With this in mind, he concluded that he should not rely on something that did not exist.

In a way it was a little bit positive, but way more of a negative.

Subaru: "Well, this isn't the right way…"

Subaru had gone the wrong way and found himself on another floor.

In front of him was a large spiral staircase—— an abnormally long spiral staircase which led to the lower floors of the Tower.

He had heard that the Tower consisted of six floors, and that to ascend from the Sixth Floor to the Fourth Floor one would have to climb stairs that possibly went hundreds of meters high.

Subaru: "Thinking about it, the way this Tower's structured is peculiar… it's like being in a *kuusou*[133] world story now."

It was a world where foliage could treat your injuries one's by being within. Besides, in his original world, there had been some buildings which seemed to be beyond human understanding. Pyramids were one example of such a phenomenon.

Thinking about it hard enough, then maybe there was not much of a difference between this Tower and the pyramids.

Subaru: "I'm looking for things in common between this world and my original world, did the past «me» do this too?"

Subaru began to feel ridiculous at having referred to himself as the "past me".

He felt as if he had slowly been going crazy ever since losing his memories. In essence, there had not been a Subaru before or was there a Subaru after losing his memories. The past and the present too, his-self was all one continuum.

So, here too, Natsuki Subaru was——

Subaru: "——Oh?"

[133] Engrish flip. Means "fantasy" (空想), originally "ファンタジー" (fantasy).

Subaru shook his head much like trying to shake off the thoughts that had clouded his mind, and let out a small sigh.

It was truly a nonchalant sigh.

He had exhaled it completely unintentionally, despite having received something much more unexpected.

It was no more, and no less than that.

However, at the same time he had let out that breath, he had felt a slight push on his back.

Subaru: "————"

And as he let out that sigh, which was tantamount to no more than that, the world was flipped upside down.

Subaru: "Ah?"

His feet were off the ground—— No, not just his feet. His whole body was.

His whole body was detached from firm soil, he was falling down midair, losing sight of heaven and earth, overwhelmed by a feeling of weightlessness.

Engulfed by the sensation of lightness, the existence that was Natsuki Subaru, fell.

Subaru: "Wha?"

The fierce sound of wind whistled through his eardrums.

He did not understand. He did not understand anything. Right now, Natsuki Subaru was falling. He was falling. Spinning round and round in midair, as he fell down head-first.

Falling, falling, falling, and as he fell, his thoughts caught up to him.

Still falling.

Subaru: "Waaait, wait, wait, wait——"

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Y_alruqaishi (source)

The world revolved in his vision. His limbs were flailing in midair. He did not know how many seconds had elapsed, but finally Subaru understood what had happened.

Falling, he was falling. He was going to crash. He would hit the ground after falling from above.

He was swallowed by darkness as he fell past the spiral staircase. As he looked around desperately to all around him, Subaru could only see the Tower's stone walls flowing past him at high speed—— No, the walls were not flowing past him. As he fell down head-first, Subaru's field of vision had been inverted, so it was in fact him who was sweeping past them.

The sensation of tumbling down caused him to retch, chunks of vomit flying out from him.

Subaru: "——Geh."

His throat clogged with vomit, Subaru was unable to even draw breath.

His nose stung, tears of pain were streaming out of him, and his organs felt like they were all in the wrong place; his whole body felt like a chaotic mess. His face, clothes, and surely the floor would have ended up flecked with vomit.

Emilia would be shocked. Beatrice would get angry at him. Ram would just coldly stare at him. Julius would give him a tired sigh. Echidna would shrug her shoulders. Meili would laugh. Shaula would point at him.

With such a feeling of frustration, Subaru had completely lost track of his own reality.

Even if he searched everywhere, he would not find it. Not up in the sky. Not within himself. Where had it gone? Where was it?

As well as his memory, he had also lost himself.

Subaru: "Mom."

Natsuki Subaru fainted just as that acrid mutter escaped from him.

His consciousness halted, his thoughts blurred together, and then——

And then——

And then————

And then——————————

Hard ground.

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???: "——Subaru! Hey, Subaru, are you okay?"

As he woke up, the first thing he heard was her chiming, silver bell voice.

He could feel her breathe near his face and her fingers on his arm. Sensing this, Subaru roused himself into consciousness, and slowly opened his heavy eyelids.

——In front of him was a frighteningly good-looking fairy of the moon.

Subaru: "Is this Emilia-chan…?"

Emilia: "Oh, Subaru, thank goodness. You woke up. I was really worried about you."

Hearing Subaru speak, the girl at his front—— Emilia, stroked her chest with a relieved look on her face. Subaru looked around the room in shock.

He was in a room completely covered in ivy, even the bed he was lying in woven from ivy. Emilia was gently patting her chest in relief, and right next to her stood a beautiful little girl with drills.

???: "Emilia, if you continue to be so gentle to him, Subaru will not reflect on his actions, I suppose. If you don't say it more severely, Betty and the others' worries won't get through to Subaru, in fact."

Emilia: "I guess you're right. But I'm surprised Beatrice would be saying that. After going into such a panic when we couldn't find Subaru, you were almost in tears when you found him lying there…"

Beatrice: "You don't have to mention the part that dispenses mentioning, I suppose!"

Beatrice turned away from them, her face reddening in anger at Emilia's innocent remarks.

Subaru, who was watching this exchange, looked on in confusion.

Subaru: "Eh? What? Was it a dream?"

Beatrice & Emilia: "——?"

At hearing Subaru say that, both Emilia and Beatrice turned towards him.

Arc 6 Chapter 38 – Who Are You

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 2 “Who Are You”, Parts 1-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, Jaerek) — Complete

Subaru gazed around the room, not knowing what had happened to him. He could not comprehend a shred of the situation.

Subaru: “————”

It was a room that he had gotten used to seeing now, even if he would hesitate to call it “familiar”.

The walls, floors and ceiling were covered in ivy, even the bed he had woken up in was woven with ivy.

In front of him stood two girls—— a beautiful lady and a beautiful little girl, both craning their necks to look at him. A huge lizard was kneeling beside his bed. On the other bed within the room, a girl with blue hair and closed eyes was lying there.

There was absolutely nothing out of the ordinary; this was Pleiades Watchtower’s Green Room.

Subaru: “But… Huh? Why am I here again?”

He did not know if he had even woken up.

With his hands on his head, Subaru recalled what had happened just before.

They had talked about challenging the Second Floor Examination whilst he had tried to confirm whether he possessed any special abilities. After all of that, after confirming that he did not possess any abilities, Subaru had walked through the Tower to join with Emilia and the others——

Subaru: “Errr? What happened after that?”

His memory of what had happened afterwards was unclear.

He had woken up on this bed all of a sudden, that impression had been strong.

And, whilst he fumbled to straighten his mind, a voice broke his train of thought,

Emilia: “Hey, Subaru, are you feeling okay?”

Subaru: “Uwahhh! Emilia-chan, you’re so close!”

Emilia’s beautiful face had suddenly popped up right next to his; she was so close to him that he could feel her breath against his face. In seeing her amethyst-colored eyes, bordered by long eyelashes, approaching out of nowhere, Subaru scooted back to the opposite side of his bed.

Emilia’s eyes widened in surprise at his overreaction.

Emilia: “You don’t have to look so scared… Besides, it was me who had been scared earlier…”

Subaru: “Scared…?”

Beatrice: “Certainly, in fact. We thought that you had disappeared, so we searched for you and found you collapsed, I suppose. It’d be improper to not be worried, in fact.”

Subaru: “Seriously? I collapsed again?”

Beatrice crossed her arms and snorted in exasperation. Subaru was caught by surprise by her words; he stood up and patted his body to make sure it was okay.

Yet, he couldn’t feel any abnormalities. Though it was dubious whether he would notice any difference considering his amnesia, there were no obvious signs of trauma.

Subaru: “Still, it’s pretty dangerous to collapse twice in such a short time… Although it has only been a couple of hours, should I feel lucky that my memories weren’t lost again?”

Beatrice: “What are you grumbling about… Subaru, you should have something to say to Betty, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Something to say…?”

Beatrice hurled these words at him, as he stared at his outstretched arms. Subaru turned around to see both Emilia and Beatrice staring at him.

He was a little bit worried about what would he have to tell the two.

Subaru: “Well, I’m sorry. I apologize for worrying you all. You both saved me again.”

Beatrice: “You’re doing fine so far.”

Emilia: “Heh, you are most welcome. But, I’m quite glad that nothing happened to you. I’m so relieved.”

Subaru: “Ah, yes. Sorry Emilia-chan, it’s inexcusable for me to cause you so much trouble all the time.”

Raising his hand in apology, Subaru expressed his gratitude towards Emilia. However, upon hearing Subaru’s words, Emilia furrowed her shapely eyebrows.

Her amethyst eyes looked absolutely bewildered.

Emilia: “Well, would, wait… Subaru, what happened just now?”

Subaru: “What happened, that’s a vague question. What’s the issue?”

Emilia: “Well, just now you called me Emilia-chan. Somehow, Subaru calling me that makes me feel reaaally uneasy.”

While saying this, Emilia began to fiddle with her long silver hair as she nervously looked at Subaru. Her gaze seemed to be filled with loneliness, causing Subaru to involuntarily let out an internal yelp.

A girl that was open and friendly, and an appearance that was aligned with Subaru’s taste—— however, in regards to her current emotions, Subaru felt like there was a deep gap between them.

Beatrice: “Subaru’s pranks are starting up again now, I suppose. More importantly…”

Beatrice’s mood was starting to get worse after hearing the exchange of the two. Shaking her splendid drills, she snapped her fingers at Subaru.

And, with a puff of her red cheeks, she said,

Beatrice: “It’s about time that you tell Betty and Emilia, in fact. Why did you go to the Library of Taygeta last night, I suppose? Why did you collapse there, in fact?”

Subaru: “Wait, wait, wait, wait! Wait, what, I collapsed again in Taygeta?”

Beatrice: “Again?”

Subaru: “Seriously, Taygeta is such a dreadful place… I don’t know what I was doing there again. After all, it’s a place with such a shady history, it was reckless of me, I guess.”

Subaru had been told of an incident which his own memory did not recall, and, bewildered by this fact, he began to feel a little bit unsettled.

For sure, he could not recall anything before and after he had slipped out of consciousness. Still, there should be no reason for him to have visited Taygeta again.

Rather, it was likelier that someone would have found him collapsed elsewhere in the Tower and brought him to Taygeta. Though, he did not see what the point of that would be.

Beatrice: “Wait, I suppose. Subaru.”

However, Beatrice had told him to wait up, as confusion took hold of him.

Subaru: “Yeah?”

Beatrice: “Somehow, I think we’re not on the same page, in fact. Subaru, tell us the story accurately, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Accurately…? What do you mean?”

Beatrice: “Try telling us about the situation you’re in right now.”

Patiently, Beatrice slowly spelled this out to Subaru. He nodded his head as he sensed the intimidation in her tone as she spoke those pressuring, heavy words.

And, whilst Emilia looked at him with a worried expression on her face, Subaru strained his memory in thought.

Subaru: “Well, I think I told you… when I woke up, I had no memories. Though it doesn’t mean that they are completely empty. My memories since being summoned to this parallel world are…”

Beatrice: “Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, in fact!? Memories? What do you mean by memories, I suppose!?”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Beatrice’s usually dignified manner was abruptly shattered as Subaru begun his explanation.

He was surprised by her unexpected reaction. Emilia had placed her hand on the panicked Beatrice’s shoulder to steady her. But Emilia was not calm either.

She was also looking at Subaru in astonishment.

Emilia: “Subaru, I’m sorry, I don’t know what you’re saying…”

Subaru: “No, I’d feel bothered if I stop here, I have you two here…”

——He was supposed to know what to say next, he tried to continue, but his words trailed off.

Beatrice & Emilia: “————”

Both Emilia and Beatrice looked at Subaru with sheer bewilderment in their eyes. It was plain to him that they were not acting.

And because he thought they were not acting, that made it all the more terrifying to him.

Why had they forgotten the time he had told them about his amnesia?

Surely, it was not that the Tower had the capacity to absorb memories, and it so happened that Subaru would not be the only one to find himself without memories. A terrifying thought rose to his mind, namely, that this Tower was dreadful, sucking out everyone’s memories progressively, making conversation impossible——

And then, Subaru realized.

Subaru: “When I woke up, I was talking to these two…”

And on top of that, he may have remembered something—— No, not “may have”. He had definitely remembered something.

The first time he had met Emilia and Beatrice—— for Subaru, the first time meeting them, then having been told that he had lost his memories, that conversation had sounded exactly like the one now.

To put it more plainly, waking up in the Green Room, lying on the ivy bed, was that not a carbon copy of the situation from earlier, when he was told he had lost his memories?

Subaru: “————”

Thinking about this fact, Subaru gulped loudly.

Gazing at Emilia and Beatrice, both of their behaviors had not changed.

However, it was not from distrust that they were glancing at Subaru in sheer bewilderment, rather it was from heart-felt concern towards “Subaru”.

The fact that there was no deception in their gazes made Subaru feel much calmer at heart.

In all honesty, there was great turmoil within Subaru’s heart, as if it had been tossed about by a gigantic wave. But, having made this guess at the current situation——

Subaru: “I am seeing the same events again—— In other words, these are precognitive dreams.”

Given his situation upon awakening, was it not reasonable to think this?

If so, that loss of consciousness—— should he rather say that he had woken up? In the moment just before being roused from slumber, his memories had been incredibly hazy. Dreams did, for some reason, slip through the cracks between one’s fingers even when attempting to keep them from crumbling.

Or, perhaps these precognitive dreams were a special ability bestowed upon Subaru when summoned into this world——

Subaru: “It’s difficult to make use of, it’s a pretty *urusai*[134] ability…”

However, there was no doubt that were he able to master it, then it would be quite a potent ability.

In the end, a precognitive dream would allow him to foresee the future. The longer it would show him the truth for, the greater chance of finding a clue to overcome the situation

Unfortunately, he did not think that he got much useful information out of this precognitive dream——

Subaru: “——You two, I need you to calm down just a little, and hear what I have to say.”

Sitting up straight, Subaru now had an understanding of the ability he possessed, turned towards them and spoke those words. Emilia and Beatrice both looked at Subaru and nodded.

Looking towards the two, serious expressions on their faces, Subaru spoke with a slight hint of hesitation,

Subaru: “I don’t know if you can believe this, but I seem to have lost my memories.”

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——Subaru had awakened at the Library of Taygeta, and lost his memories.

It took as much time as it had in the precognitive dream for Emilia and Beatrice to digest what Subaru had revealed.

Emilia: “Eiiiiii!”

With an air-splitting sound, Emilia slammed her palms onto her own white cheeks with all her strength. Her anxious eyes widened up in pain, and at the shock, as she motivated herself with an “There.”

It was a brave, almost manly way of accepting it, something he had also seen in his precognitive dream.

[134] Engrish flip. Means “picky/selective” (煩い), originally “ピーキー” (picky).

Emilia: “I got my spirit back. Being like that is no-good, is it? How could we keep making that troubled face when Subaru must be feeling even more troubled than we are. Quick, Beatrice too!”

Having rallied her strength with a vigorous speech, Emilia shook Beatrice’s shoulder. In front of Emilia’s geared-up presence, Beatrice looked at her, unable to hide her confusion.

Emilia: “I’m shocked too, and I also understand the sadness… but right now, we have to think about the one who’s taking this the hardest. We have to do something for him, don’t we?”

Beatrice: “B-Betty is…”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru fought back a pang in his chest as he watched Beatrice struggle to get her words out.

Subaru knew exactly what Beatrice would say, and what sort of face she would make. But he was quite wrong in thinking that it would bring him some peace of mind.

Having to betray someone’s feeling of hopes was tough; rather, it was terrifying.

No matter how many times he had to do it, regardless of whether it was the same problem for the second time, it was all the same.

And now, Subaru knew Beatrice much better than the first time around. That was why now was far tougher for Subaru than the first time around.

???: “…Auuuuggghhh, just, really! Subaru is just the most hopeless Contractor in the world, in fact!”

With that said, Beatrice broke through her embarrassment and the pattern of the butterfly wings that adorned her irises started to flutter in her eyes.

While he was relieved by that, Subaru felt a strong sense of self-hatred.

——Was this right? Was he satisfied with this? Yeah, Natsuki Subaru.

——Could he really erect a castle upon the sand, on top of the bonds and faith he had already built up?

Subaru: “————”

Subaru gritted his teeth together as he saw Emilia and Beatrice's heart-wrenching, albeit gentle, determination.

Subaru had not confided with them that he was able to experience precognitive dreams.

As for the conversation after he woke up, as he remembered their names, he pushed the fact that not all his memories had been lost.

In fact, Subaru's report had been about the allocation of his missing memories, not only that he had lost his memories. He could not afford to doubt the two people with him, and furthermore, Subaru himself did not wish to engage in any unproductive conversation.

Above all else, he wanted to figure out to which extent his precognitive dreams would show the truth correctly.

For this reason, he did not want to create a situation which would deviate from what his precognitive dream had shown him. Albeit some changes had occurred at the start, those deviations were nothing major.

However, this was not the only reason for which Subaru did not disclose his precognitive dreams.

Subaru: "————"

Neither Emilia nor Beatrice, Ram nor Julius, Echidna nor even anyone, had explained to Subaru that he had this Precognitive Dreams ability. Shaula and Meili also had not.

It was difficult to imagine that they had intentionally hidden it from Subaru. Even under the prior circumstances, it was difficult to believe that they all possessed the same intention; it made no sense.

Then it was inevitable that there was only one reason as to why they would not know of his Precognitive Dreams—— that is, Natsuki Subaru had never revealed to them his ability.

Subaru: "…What were you thinking, Natsuki Subaru."

Subaru called his name out as if referring to a different person.

——No, saying as if referring to a different person was wrong. It was a different person.

To Subaru, “Natsuki Subaru” was an unknown person who did not exist. He could not guess what he had been thinking and he could not interact with him. There would be no chance of getting to understand him.

Why did “Subaru” not tell Emilia nor the others about his power?

Was it because he did not want to change the development of these precognitive dreams as much as possible? Even if it was due to that, surely once the situation had been overcome there would have been time to confide this?

Otherwise, was there a reason as to why he could not say it, or as to why he wished not to say it?

Distrust of the old “Subaru” was steadily growing within him.

Subaru: “You…”

——*What were you thinking, “Natsuki Subaru”?*

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——After that, the events took place as expected, roughly following what he had seen in his precognitive dreams.

Emilia: “So, I guess everyone is pretty shocked… Subaru is in quite a situation right now. But, even in a situation like this… no, precisely because the situation is like this, we should give him our support.”

Emilia explains to the others how Subaru has lost his memories. Although it wasn’t the greatest of explanations, it was now impossible to make a follow-up in case he drastically changed the events. Thus, in place of Emilia, who sucked with words, Beatrice ended up taking on the struggle.

And then——

Ram: “Is this some kind of prank, Barusu?”

Ram had suspected that Subaru’s situation might have been a prank——

Shaula: “Say, Master… you’re still not tired of playing around like this~? Just how many times do you have to forget me before you cut that ouuut?”

Shaula had indifferently accepted that he had lost his memories, as if she thought it was something that couldn’t be helped——

Meili: “Really, onii-san’s such a headache-san.”

Whether disinterested or not, Meili smiled at the prank, as if enjoying the atmosphere of confusion——

“Anastasia”: “Just, give him some time to compose himself. That should be fine, no?”

Worried about Julius as he had become extremely upset at hearing that Subaru had lost his memories, soon after Echidna suggested for them to take a brief interval to collect their thoughts.

Subaru then accepted Ram’s invitation and left the room to fetch some water. Once the two of them were alone, Ram grabbed Subaru by his collar and pushed him against the wall.

Ram: “…Please, spit it all, out.”

She had not parted with her nobility. However, that was not to say that her very core had been rocked. After hearing Ram’s quiet sobs, Subaru returned to where everyone was with one conviction.

——The precognitive dreams were accurate. They were terribly accurate and foreshadowed the events completely.

Subaru did not know everything they would say and do, but the impression that they had given was pretty much unchanged. If there was a problem——

“Anastasia”: “Natsuki-kun is quite calm despite the situation.”

Re-introducing each other, and both revealing their bombshells, with that Anastasia’s consciousness was currently overwritten by Echidna’s, Echidna said that to Subaru.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru felt his mouth dry up after hearing Echidna’s words.

To be honest, Echidna's observation was understandable. Subaru himself couldn't really do much about it.

Everyone was shocked and in a state of panic. Still, whilst seeing her trying to smooth over the absurd situation, he could not help but not feel much empathy from within his heart for them. It was like when one watched a movie for a second time, the emotions experienced would not be as strong as the first time it was watched.

That which he felt even stronger, was a flurry of negative emotions, namely sympathy towards them for putting on such a brave face, guilt for leaving them as-is despite knowing that, and a feeling of revulsion towards "Subaru", who probably would have continued to do such.

It was no wonder that Subaru bore a dark expression on his face coupled with a taciturn attitude, even though they had thought that was him remaining calm. In any case——

Subaru: "I'm happy that things have settled down. I was the type of kid who'd always get «he never settles down» written down in his report card."

"Anastasia": "*Reeport card*, I do not completely understand that that means… is that something from that «parallel world»?"

Subaru: "Yeah."

Narrowing his eyes, Subaru nodded his head at Echidna's question.

Questions regarding the "parallel world" were asked again, and Subaru's replies remained unchanged. He explained how he had been summoned to this different world, and found himself in this place.

And the same understanding as before came from Emilia, Echidna and the others, who concluded his origin laid beyond the Great Waterfall.

Perhaps, even if a thorough reproduction of the events of his precognitive dreams was not achieved, events that held some sense of importance would still be realized with some slight changes to them. It was something typically found in the games and manga that involved some kind of future prediction mechanic, in Subaru's recollection.

Though the response to a sudden situation might change, what would be settled upon would not fade away so easily. A person who would have decided to ask someone out on a date, would go on to ask the person out in a completely different way than before, as there would be some notable obstacles in the way—— that was the feeling he got.

In other words, Echidna was going to ask about the other world, regardless of whether he had lost his memories or not.

Subaru: “Even though I didn’t explain it up until now, was I still careless in mentioning the word «parallel world»… My understanding what I was thinking keeps going down.”

Due to the nature of his precognitive dreams, confiding about his ability was difficult, and rather than that, it was incredibly strange that he had not spoken talked about that different world. It was almost like he had just given up, deeming it pointless to confide it.

——As if he were afraid to.

“Anastasia”: “After all, it is odd that you sound the least confused amongst us. We are all growing uneasy here, thinking we must do something about it.”

Subaru: “Maybe this is what they mean when they talk about everyone being in a panic, but the party in question instead grows calm. Even I’m nervous, thinking we ought to do something about it. So rest assured there.”

Emilia: “I feel like we can’t feel relieved with that at all…”

With that light-hearted talk, Echidna shrugged, and so did Subaru. Emilia looked quite dispirited as she watched that exchange; the mood was still, somehow, hitting rock bottom.

After all, Subaru’s attitude was a big factor. He had tried to mimic his dream self’s actions as much as possible; but in honesty, his demeanor lacked clarity.

It was very difficult to imitate the confused self he had seen in his dream. So, before he spouted out additional nonsense——

Subaru: “Anyways, I understand the situation we are in. I know that there’s a lot of confusion, but let’s overcome it together. Let’s do something about it.”

Clapping his hands together, Subaru tried to forcefully advance the conversation.

What had been done after that last discussion? Beatrice nodded in response, and as if obeying the precognitive dream, she spoke,

Beatrice: “You’ll want to check Taygeta’s Library, I suppose.”

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Shaula: “Ueeeh~.”

With a loose-lipped smile, the glamorous, beautiful woman let out a shriek.

If she would just straighten herself out and start to look more dignified her beauty would surely captivate the hearts of many men. Her face relaxed though, as she tried to snuggle into Subaru.

Shaula: “Master, Master. I’m haaappyyy~. I swear I’ll make you haaappyyy!”

Subaru: “Hey, don’t say that. Don’t hug my arm. You’re frighteningly soft!”

Shaula: “Ahhhn~, I just wanna have it so those mean parts of yours are smushed, you know.”

Subaru continued to push her away by her forehead whilst Shaula tried to desperately cling onto his arms.

In all honesty, being clung onto by a beautiful woman who’d had a tempting appearance from the get-go was something Subaru would prefer to refrain from, both in terms of his strength as a human, and as a boy.

Subaru and the others had arrived now at the Third Floor of Pleiades Watchtower, where the Library of Taygeta was located. As it had been in his dream, they would search the Library in an attempt to find out how Subaru had lost his memories, and if possible, restore them.

However, Subaru knew that their search would be fruitless, and that no results would be obtained. It was going to be an irritating time for him now, since he hadn't been allowed to participate in the search.

Though to him, it looked like Shaula was acting way too over-familiar than his dream had shown——

Shaula: "After all, Master, you chose us over that ankle-biter, didn't youuuu?"

Subaru: "It's not like I specifically chose you! Due to what's happening, I couldn't help but be stuck with you!"

Shaula spoke this with a ditzy expression, talking about their approach to Taygeta. Although the distance to the Library had not been long, Subaru had arranged it so that he would not have to hold hands with Emilia and Beatrice.

His real intention behind that, had been borne out of pangs of conscience towards Beatrice and Emilia. Given that he knew what was going to happen thanks to his precognitive dream, he had not revealed the fact that it was probably going to be a waste of time, and adopting a birds-eye view of the situation, Subaru had treated the two girls like so.

Therefore, he was now sitting next to the air-headed Shaula, whilst waiting for the party to finish searching Taygeta.

Shaula: "Finally, Master recognized how charming and attractive I am! I had to wait four-hundred years for this! I'm so happy, I'm so happy! I will give you such an *atsuiseppun*[135]!"

Subaru: "That's not what I was implying! That's scary! Really, stop it!"

Shaula was pressing her body down onto his, and Subaru tried desperately to push her off, but because of her unusual strength, he found himself pinned against a wall. Far from being a *kabe-don*, it was a *kabe-gowaa*[136]! That was how intense it was.

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[135] Engrish flip. Means "passionate kiss (with a nuance of burning desire)" (暑い接吻), originally "ディープなキス" (deep).

[136] Kabe-don is the act of "slamming one's hand onto the wall in front of someone", where "kabe" (壁) means "wall", and "don" (ドン) is supposed to represent a bang or thump. This is a common trope in Anime. *Kabe-gowaa* is a pun, where "gowaa" (ゴワァ) is a sound effect for something stronger than the conventional "don". Alternatively, it may be drawing from the word "ゴワゴワ", which has nuances of "discomfort". Since Shaula is jumping straight to first base.

And, just before the virginity of Subaru's lips, which had never experienced the love of a woman, was forcefully taken away——

???: "Hey, hey, onii-san seems to dislike this. Quit fooling about."

Shaula: "Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!"

It had been Meili who had dragged Shaula off him by pulling her back by her ponytail. Even having the strength of a little girl, by putting her weight into it, it would cause massive pain.

However, Shaula reclaimed her braid with a twist of her neck, and carefully cradled her long, black hair against her chest.

Shaula: "What did you do to my hair!? What did you do to my precious hair, you horrible little giiirl!"

Meili: "I don't want the silver-haired onee-san or Beatrice-chan to be angry. I was keeping watch to make sure that naked onee-san didn't do anything bad to onii-san."

Shaula: "Grrrrr! So annoying! Master, please do somethiing!"

Subaru: "Shaula, don't you dare come within two meters of me. You're scary."

Shaula: "Master's such an idiooot~."

Shaula turned her back from Subaru, feigning a break down to tears.

Subaru scratched his cheeks in confusion as he looked on at her exposed back, then he turned around to face Meili, holding her hands behind her back.

Subaru: "Ah, you really saved me… now that's a strange thing to say to a killer-for-hire."

Meili: "Don't worry. This killer's gone out of business, now I do what onii-san, onee-san and their friends tell me to. Onii-san and the others can make good use of me, like when I help out with the bad animal-chans."

Subaru: "————"

She spoke with neither malice nor ulterior motive, hence why Subaru did not react to her words.

Meili did not seem to be especially affected by any particular pangs of conscience as she spoke. Those represented the difference between the values of his world, and this one.

Meili: "————"

She said nothing in response to Subaru's silence, and remained looking at him silently, with an unfathomable expression on her face. Meili now turned to gaze indifferently in the direction of Emilia and the others, still searching the Library.

The girl was quite short, had a youthful face, her arms and legs were still tiny, and there was still quite a way to go before she would possess the curvature of a woman—— in the end, she was still a child.

It was unbearable to him that she held such broken values about herself.

Subaru: "Maybe, there's still plenty we can rely on you for, so I'm counting on you!"

Meili: "——? Eh, so this is what you're saying? That you'll make good use of me."

Subaru: "No, not use. Rely. You're not a tool that can be just used, think of it like a… friendship?"

Meili: "…Hmmm~."

For a second Meili had regarded Subaru's words in shock, but as it had only been for a fleeting moment, she quickly averted her eyes afterwards. Subaru was relieved that she had not reacted in discomfort; rather it had seemed like a faint glimmer of comfort had flitted across her face.

Even if within her heart she held broken values about herself, it did not mean that everything she could feel would end up being out of sync from that which Subaru knew.

The fact that they both could compromise about these unknown circumstances, made Subaru feel a little bit better.

Meili: "…Onii-san really doesn't remember anything, right?"

Subaru: "Yup? Unfortunately. Was something on your mind?"

He had unexpectedly stirred something about his memories from Meili, and so Subaru asked a question in return. To his query, Meili just put her fingers to her lips, let out an “Oh yeah”, and gave a very sweet smile.

Meili: “Petra-chan’d cry if she heard about this.”

Subaru: “Ugh… The name of a girl I don’t know, again.”

Meili: “Petra-chan is a girl that loves onii-san. She was worried about you going all the way out here, it almost feels like I could hear her say «See, I told you so».”

Subaru: “God damn that me from yesterday, what thoughtless things did he do…”

Subaru looked on bitterly, thinking in distress about the feelings of this young girl, Petra, that he had not yet seen. How much would he end up learning about the footprints that the “Subaru” unknown to him had left?

Meili: “Really, I honestly think that my opinion of onii-san from yesterday is that he was quite careless as weeell~.”

Meili was stretching as she said this, ignoring the turmoil she had left in Subaru’s heart. In his mind it had sounded like what she had said had been accompanied by a very strange emotion.

In any case, Emilia and the others would come back sooner than he could confirm it.

As expected, no clues had been found, and with that fact, it only reinforced how accurate his predictive dream had been.

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Since the search of Taygeta had ended with no success, they would now prepare to go up to the Second Floor.

In other words, this represented the full scope of the precognitive dreams in Subaru's knowledge, so everything beyond this point was unknown—— Subaru had until now not doubted the accuracy in his future prediction ability at all.

The events had transitioned just as Subaru had experienced them before. If any issues were to occur at this point, he would not be able to respond by using the knowledge of the future shown by his precognitive dreams.

Subaru: "I'm able to predict the future, isn't it insane that I managed to confirm it?"

However, it was also strange.

In the first place, Subaru did not know how, or what conditions were needed to activate his precognitive dreams. Would it activate if he fell asleep, or did it need some sort of trigger; or was it just completely random?

It would be unlikely that there would be time to find a place to sleep due to the urgency of the current situation, but because of that, he wanted to depend on the power of his foresight. Certainly, he would need to find out more details about this.

He would need to investigate thoroughly what he could do with his foresight.

Subaru: "For now, just as in my dream, I managed to force Beatrice to leave me alone, but…"

Subaru had pushed through in his request to Beatrice to leave him alone, so he could experiment with the transformation poses via trial and error.

It had seemed that Beatrice's tenacity in attempting to remain more attached to him was greater compared to what he'd seen in his dreams. That was probably as a consequence of being around her less than in his dreams, such as on the way to Taygeta.

In any case, he had a reason for being alone.

Subaru: "I have to find out why I woke up and what happened to me just before I woke up."

It may be that he just happened to wake up normally, beckoned by the real world. However, it could also be that there had been something within his dream that had caused him to wake up.

Something like encountering a horrible experience, or a painful one.

Subaru: "I'm a little freaked out right now… what if I start to have precognitive dreams-ception; it's spooky, it's like as if I was dreaming of being a butterfly[137]."

Dreaming of being a butterfly was the situation where one would dream of physically being a butterfly, but when upon waking up, one wouldn't be really sure whether they were a butterfly dreaming of being a person, or a person having dreamt of being a butterfly.

It felt like it would become a vicious, never-ending loop, like a self-fulfilling prophecy that would drive the footholds of his own self to a corner of uncertainty, as something unreliable.

If this were to be applied to Subaru's current situation, was this truly a reality he had woken up to from a prophetic dream, or was this a prophetic dream he believed to be the reality he had woken up to?

No way, he'd rather not be jolted awaken by Emilia and Beatrice in the green room this had started in once more, but——

Subaru: "——To prevent this, I need to go past where my dream ended. If I can do that, then I should be able to tell Emilia and the others about my precognitive dreams."

The "Subaru" before losing his memories had unfortunately avoided confiding this information to Emilia and the others. However, Subaru now was anxious to change this situation and tell everyone what he could do.

He did not know what would become, if he were to do such a careless thing; frightened by this anxiety, he did not want to bring a situation about where he would delay it now.

Subaru: "——I have decided."

Looking back to re-evaluate his position, Subaru had finally decided that he would tell them about his precognitive dreams.

[137] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "Seems to be referencing this famous Chinese saying." As a fun fact, this is also a (perhaps unintentional) reference to the current title of the deleted Lust IF Web Novel Chapter (Butterfly's Dream).

Nonetheless, what was coming up ahead was an unknown to him. After the point at which Beatrice had left, his memories, including those of having performed the transformation poses, were quite fuzzy.

Therefore, showing proof that he could experience precognitive dreams would be quite difficult to do. In addition, he did not know how to activate them. He would need them to cooperate with him when attempting to explain his ability.

If he could master them, they would become an extremely powerful weapon at his disposal. Or perhaps it was the weapon necessary for conquering Pleiades Watchtower.

With these thoughts in mind——

???: "——As for Natsuki-kun, is it not dangerous for him to accompany us in the crazed state he is in right now?"

???: "————"

Having arrived in front of the hall, in an attempt to join everyone, Subaru held his breath at hearing those words.

The intelligent voice he had heard was Echidna's.

For some reason, in his mind, Subaru had hesitated to announce his presence, and decided to hide behind the wall. Without noticing Subaru's presence, the conversation in the hall continued.

Emilia: "Echidna, what do you mean by dangerous?"

"Anastasia": "There is nothing else to say right? Considering his current state, it is certain he has lost his memories. However, what he said afterwards was truly crazed. The way he explained the term »parallel world» is proof."

Emilia: "Parallel… world…"

Julius: "You do not truly believe he came from beyond the Great Waterfall?"

Julius and Emilia seemed shocked at hearing Echidna's words.

Subaru's heart lurched, what did Echidna's remarks from just now mean? He wanted to jump out from his hiding spot and ask her, but for now he would suppress that emotion.

Even if Subaru did not ask, surely someone else would——

Ram: "It was certainly an absurd explanation."

Emilia: "Ram… You too doubt what Subaru said?"

Emilia reacted in surprise at Ram's cold, indifferent tone. In response to her question, Ram curtly spoke, "Emilia-sama",

Ram: "It is not as if I doubt Barusu's argument from the start. Indeed, Barusu's knowledge, behavior and strange customs are things unknown to us. It is clear that he may indeed come from a place which none of us here know about."

Emilia: "Well, in that case…"

Ram: "But, his origins, they are limited to this world. The Great Waterfall… Being from beyond that place may surely be tailored to mean that term of Barusu's, «parallel world», but I cannot believe the existence of such a place… There is no reason to believe in Barusu's words at all, anymore."

Emilia: "Ram…"

Emilia's voice faintly trailed away as she heard Ram's explanation, which felt like she was enduring bitterness in it. But there was no reply; and so Emilia quietly cleared her throat,

Emilia: "I believe in Subaru, so Beatrice too, please, please, try to believe what Subaru said."

Julius: "…Emilia-sama, Echidna is not suggesting that Subaru is attempting to purposefully deceive us. She is just stating that he is in a terrible state of confusion."

Beatrice: "In that statement, you still agree with that Spirit, I suppose!?"

Julius tried to rationally explain their thoughts to Emilia, however, Beatrice was having none of it, as she was intent on remaining on Subaru's side in this matter. Her temper had flared considerably.

At that moment, an unnerving silence had fallen within the room; Subaru's forehead had started to sweat.

Shaula: "Heeeey, it's best if you all quit fighting and settle dooown. Even if you are are at each other's throats arguing here, right now, Master's not here, so no way he's gonna be pleased."

Meili: "I don't think it's quite a discussion on that scale yet… But, yeah, that's right."

He heard the voices of Shaula and Meili, who still seemed to be bystanders. Laughing rather superciliously for a short while, Meili continued her speech with "Going crazy",

Meili: "Why don't you ask onii-san directly? Onii-san, are you going crazy?"

Subaru: "——Hk."

Subaru clenched his molars to those venomous words. He withdrew from the wall with surprising calmness; taking caution as to not make a noise when walking, he distanced himself from the room.

Subaru: "————"

After putting some distance between them, his prudent footsteps quickened in pace, which then turned into a run.

Then, arriving at a passageway where no one was present, he pressed his forehead against the wall.

Subaru: "Fuck…!"

Not knowing what he should say to whom, Subaru struck the wall, letting out the feelings smoldering inside him.

The discussion that had taken place in Subaru's absence was an unexpected shock to him.

He had not been conceited enough to think that he had gained their full confidence. Rather, he could safely say that such a point had not been in his thoughts.

Subaru had thought that trust was such a basic premise.

Emilia and Beatrice had been too kind and thoughtful towards Subaru.

Whilst insisting to himself that it had felt far too uncomfortable, he had tricked himself into believing that it was true. There was no doubt in him that he was from a different place, and that that would have help them conquer the Tower.

With the handicap of losing his memories and his calm and collected thoughts, he had lost all his usefulness.

Looking at it objectively, he realized just how shameless he was.

What was trust in this Tower amid the desert? He himself could not understand it much.

He wondered if he could ever handle what “Natsuki Subaru” had gained.

Subaru: “In this state, it’s no use telling them about my precognitive dreams.”

The fact that they believed in his memory loss was proof of these people’s virtue.

At the same time however, they were sensible people who did not believe in the existence of a different world”.

Therefore, he did not even have to consider the response provoked by an explanation of his precognitive dreams.

Subaru: “From the start, I bungled it up…”

Messed up, he had messed up.

In the meanwhile, how would Subaru overturn their evaluations of him, showing that he could be dependable at this point.

What was sought now, what was needed now was “Natsuki Subaru”. Not Natsuki Subaru.

Would it be alright if he feigned ignorance and went back down to them? Also, in a state of unknowingness of the kind of exchange that had taken place, would it be okay if he shamelessly joined their capture of the Second Floor?

Or would Emilia and Beatrice veto that, and have him stay behind. And who would be keeping an eye on him there.

At least he would like to hope for Shaula or Meili, given that conversation with them was no issue.

Subaru: "…Fuck, I'm such an idiot."

Whilst saying those words out loud, Subaru abruptly came out of the passageway he was walking through.

He had come across the great spiral staircase which connected the Fourth Floor to the Floors below—— a gaping hole that spanned the middle of the Watchtower to its lower half. It was truly colossal.

Subaru: "Spiral, staircase…"

Suddenly, paying close attention to that scene, Subaru started to ponder.

Including his dreams, this was his second time he had come here. Both in dream and reality, Emilia and everyone else had guided the amnesiac Subaru around the Tower.

So, recognizing this place was not a mistake, but——

Subaru: "No, apart than that, I feel something strange…"

Goosebumps coursed his body, he felt the hairs on his back stand on end.

The blood in his whole body felt cold, and the ringing in his ears was awfully loud. His heartbeat had accelerated, his breathing became rough, and his knees began trembling for whatever reason.

As his teeth begun making an uncontrollable chattering noise, Subaru became aware of these abnormalities.

However, they were not caused due to any changes in temperature or any external causes.

This abnormality, this unusual phenomenon, had been caused by Subaru's own body. Speaking more on that matter, it was as if the effect on his body was due to Subaru's spirit, or something from a deeper place——

Subaru: "——Ah."

With a faint tap, Subaru took a step forward.

——No, it could not be said that he stepped forward.

To step forward, was a term which presumed the existence of solid ground which could be stepped on.

Stepping ahead, his leg had come out.

And his foot had scratched the air. And so, he,

Subaru: “A

A

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——!?”

Falling, falling, he was falling.

His whole body was overwhelmed by a feeling of weightlessness, losing sight of what was up or down, a tremendous gust of wind hitting his eardrums.

That moment, Subaru understood what was happening. He was falling.

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Norvak (source)

No, there had been a light impact back then. That did not necessarily mean that he had just fallen.

He had been pushed down—— “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA——!!”

Screaming his lungs out, Subaru desperately stretched out his hands. Searching for somewhere, anywhere to hold on to.

There was nothing. There was nowhere he could hold on to. The world around him was revolving, so much that he was unable to comprehend the world around him.

A desperate feeling of wanting to vomit overpowered him, as all the contents of his body were pulled from bottom to top. Chunks of yellow vomit overflowed from his mouth, spilling out right into the air around him.

This sensation, he remembered it.

In the midst of his pain and vomiting, the memories that had once been ambiguous suddenly became sharper.

Yes, yes, that was it.

Before he had woken up, at the end of his precognitive dream, Subaru had experienced the same thing.

He had fallen, futilely lamented his situation, and then lost consciousness.

And after that situation’s terminus, he had woken up from his precognitive dream and found himself in the Green Room——

At that moment, a great impact shattered the right side of Subaru’s body into fine pieces.

CRACK

The sound of something breaking filled the air, his right side felt like it had been struck by lightning, but Subaru’s cries were silenced.

And, right after, even if a bit belated, severe pain coursed through his body.

Subaru: “GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!”

Looking towards it, his right arm was sticking out at an odd angle, completely broken from the elbow with the bone protruding out from his skin. He was covered in blood, his cover was torn, and he could see his own pinkish muscles and white bone laying underneath his torn skin.

He had crashed. Subaru's body had crashed against the spiral staircase while falling towards the bottom. As it was now, his uncontrolled spiraling descent would end up destroying Subaru's body, and yet, it would not stop.

——No, it was far worse.

Subaru: "GHA! GHHH! GHHUU!"

The body, tumbling downwards, had struck one of the lower steps of the spiral staircase, spraying blood everywhere.

It had been bad luck that it had been his head to hit the next step. His forehead cracked; he felt like something that should not be spilled was spilling out from the insides of his skull.

Instantly, his consciousness went somewhere far away, and then was gone—— and when it seemed like all had ended, his body collided with another step, and the pain from his broken right arm jolted him awake as his body continued to lose its shape.

Subaru: "AHHHHHHHHH!!! GYAAAAAA!!"

It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts.

Pain, anguish, vomiting, burning, Natsuki Subaru was being shattered into small pieces.

Arms, feet, face, every part of him was slammed and scraped against the stone staircase, broken, crushed, making it so he no longer resembled a human being. No longer a person, into something that no longer was "Natsuki Subaru".

——*Memories are what shape people*.

Subaru: "Fuh."

Whilst spattering out a vast amount of blood, Subaru suddenly heard this voice.

Who had said such a silly thing, saying it like they understood him?

But, it was a good thing to say. Memories were what shaped people. It was a good saying.

If so, what the hell did that make someone who had lost their memories, and no longer was who they once were?

Subaru: "————"

Blood was spewing from his mouth; quite literally, a scream that spewed blood, his throat had been completely crushed.

Natsuki Subaru was falling apart, crumbling away until he reached the distant, distant ground.

There was no waking up from this dream. Natsuki Subaru had failed.

There would be no more second chances to try again.

The end drew near.

Slowly, darkness, darkness, the world around him was being dyed black.

——Who are you.

And finally, after all the pain and hot blood, Natsuki Subaru crumbled out of existence.

Arc 6 Chapter 39 – Ruins

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 2 “Who Are You”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, Jaerek) — Complete

Repeatedly, over and over, a scorching heat filled his very being.

His skull, his limbs, his torso, his organs, his flesh and blood.

Every single thing in his body was crushed, smashed, twisted and broken. His mind was set alight by the anguish, it was as if every single one of his nerve-endings were being plucked right now, his soul on fire, burning away.

The screams he let out were racked with unimaginable fever and sense of loss.

Pain, pain, pain, pain, pain, pain pain pain pain pain pain pain painpainpainpainpainpainpainpain.

He was pain.

There was only pain. There was just pain. The world enveloping him was filled with pain. Even just thinking this caused more pain to cloud over him.

His thoughts, his very existence was painted with pain.

Anxiety, confusion, nervousness, sorrow, anger, despair, all of these emotions were meaningless in the face of pain.

They were meaningless. Yes, they were meaningless.

Thoughts, actions, pondering, opinions, hopes, memories, they were all equally meaningless.

When it came to those things which were the very embodiment of worthlessness, what was there to value when they had been crushed, smashed and lost in the end?

Only the endless pain inscribed within his soul made him aware of his own existence.

Then suddenly, the never-ending pain, started to fade——

Subaru: "——AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!"

He woke up screaming.

Right now, even the fact that his screaming throat had been crushed, drowned amidst welling blood, was naught but a memory.

Subaru: "AHHHHHHHHH!! UAHHHHHHHHH!!"

Whilst shouting, he tried to protect his body from being crushed using his arms and legs. His arms should be broken, completely unusable, yet they moved.

Although they moved, he lost his balance as his body was still overwhelmed by the sensation of weightlessness and so, falling, he hit the floor.

Subaru: "Guh."

He tried to speak, yet nothing resembling speech came out. He rolled onto the floor.

The feeling of the floor was strange; he felt a sensation like that of a rope against his body. He opened his throat, which was screaming for oxygen, and immediately felt a pungent pain strike it, resulting in a coughing fit.

Unable to bear it, he vomited. His stomach was mostly empty. Foul-smelling watery chunks of vomit were spewed out of his acrid mouth onto the floor.

Subaru: "Blurgh, buh! Guh, guh, argh! Gah, huu!"

Coughing violently, and spitting out a bit of bile, tears and snot caked his crumpled face. Cowering and covering his face, he feebly smacked his forehead against the floor over and over again.

Repeating this motion, he finally noticed it.

——That the overwhelming pain that assaulted his body like blazing heat as it was crushed, had vanished.

Subaru: “——Ah?”

He was so surprised by how suddenly his pain had vanished, that he had not, until now, realized that someone was gently patting his back.

???: “Is everything better now?”

Reflected in his tear-encrusted eyes was the person who had been patting his back.

Despite his blurry vision, the image of the girl, with beautiful silver hair and eyes of amethyst, was quite vivid—— on her face was an expression of worry whilst she patted his back. Subaru let out a wheeze.

???: “Suba…”

Subaru: “AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!”

He twisted his body and shook off the pale hand that had been touching his back.

As he did so, a trace of surprise flitted across the girl’s eyes whose arm had until then been patting him. But the one here whose soul had been more seriously damaged was him.

His back.

She had been touching his back.

Now and before, someone had touched his back. And, after that, agony——

Subaru: “Ah.”

He jumped back, in an attempt to escape her; he felt the hair on his back standing on end. However, his legs crumpled beneath him, and he fell flat on his backside.

As his body fell, the blow was softened by a rough, black presence underneath him,

???: “————”

Looking down, he saw the eyes of a reptilian creature staring back at him as he reacted in fright. Looking at the sharp long fangs that lined its mouth, he suddenly realized that they could easily be used as a deadly weapon to chew him up.

Subaru: “AHHHHHHHHH—— Hk!!”

Again, he screamed, attempting to escape forward this time. In front of his eyes now, he could see someone’s leg; he did not dare to look up at that someone’s face, and instead pushed away the small silhouette blocking his way, rolling to the side.

???: “Beatrice!”

With a high-pitched shrill, her chiming silver bell voice frantically cried out something, but the meaning did not reach him as he covered his ears.

Immediately, he headed towards the gap which lay in between the foliage of the room and, scolding his shaky legs, he leapt out of the room. Stepping into the stone passageway, without stopping, his body crashed into the stone wall.

Stopped in his tracks, pain coursed through him. His sight was dyed red, in his mind he imagined an echo of his bones breaking.

Subaru: “Hiii——”

His bumped right arm moved as normal. He pounded at the wall to check whether it really did move as normal. He felt pain again. He screamed again.

Steadying himself against the wall, he broke out into a tottering run.

Subaru: “Haa, huff, huff… Hk!”

He was out of breath, with drool spilling from his mouth, with sweat dripping from his forehead he continued running down the passageway as fast as he could.

Behind, he felt as if someone was following him, and many times he resisted the urge to look behind him. Had he looked back, and confirmed that someone was following him, it would have been too much for his heart to endure. It felt like it was about to burst.

He felt as if his heart was about to rupture, as if the blood within his body was rotting, and as if his body was about to shatter like from the feet up like a glass sculpture.

Whether premonition or truth, there was one thing that was clear—— the absolute, unwavering fact that were this to continue, he would die.

People were born to be ruined.

Every second one would grow older, every second one would head towards eventual death, every second one would fall towards the end.

Though, such a concept of Death meant naught to his person, right now.

In an extreme form, Death was approaching him with a steady gait. Cornering the unsightly, shameful him, who was struggling to flee, as if making sport of him.

He ran, he ran away. He ran away anyway.

Death was following him. He would be killed. He would be killed. At this rate, he would be killed.

Although he had already been killed, he was going to be killed again. Or, given such sheer agony, could it be possible to not die from it? Was that a mystery of life? That would be rather sickening.

Embellishing it as “mystery”, was rather disproportionate. It was a repulsive, unseemly attachment.

Rather, shouldn’t he be dead——?

Subaru: “——Hk.”

The beating of his heart felt like an explosion that shook his eardrums, his sight was flickering on and off. Even how he breathed resembled how a baby would take its first breaths. It was completely absurd how he looked like when escaping from his fear of death.

Yet, as comical as it was, there was no laughter. Everything to him was something that would cause him fear.

Subaru: "————"

Almost to the point he was losing track the places he was running through, all the stone passageways he had passed through appeared the same to him.

If there was one thing he understood, it was that he should not return to where he had come from. Though, if he continued to escape in this directionless fashion, he would gradually lose his way.

If he lost his way, someone would catch him. If someone were to catch him, he would lose his life.

Why, why his life? Such a question now was useless.

He had no time to wonder whether to go towards the left or towards the right.

Whilst escaping from Death which may catch up even at this very moment, he placed his right hand on the wall, relying on it, as he frantically panted for air, completely out of breath.

It felt like he was drowning.

It was as if he was struggling to break above the water's surface, even though here on ground there was no water anywhere.

Drowning, drowning, struggling as he drowned, heading towards the water's surface, kicking and struggling, kicking and struggling, kicking and struggling, floundering, floundering, floundering, before finally—

???: "——Ya prick, the hell ya doin' here so early in the mornin', oy!"

Subaru: "————"

He felt his feet stop as he sensed a monstrously huge presence right in front of his eyes.

——No, his feet were not the only thing that had stopped.

His breathing had stopped, his noisy heartbeat had stopped, and his knees which had been trembling with fear and fatigue had stopped. It felt like all his vital signs had stopped, grasped by the scruff of the neck.

——Before his eyes there stood a giant-like being, an illusion like that.

But after a few seconds, he slowly began to understand, that even though they were tall, there was no chance that the person upon the stage possessed a constitution that transcended what humans could have.

At the same time, the fact remained that there was a human being who could clad himself in such a ferocious, demonic aura.

???: “Are ya ‘lone, ya prick? Ya prick, ya’re just a lone small fry that’s not even worth talkin’ to. Small fry, so instead of person, should I go with critter[138]? Even as a critter, ya’re not even worth considerin’. Go fetch those people ya were with yesterday, and that sexy girl. Ya prick, are ya listenin’, hey! Ya prick, oy, ya prick.”

The figure that was standing still in front of him was fluidly rambling on.

They displayed showed the signs of being an extremely violent person, and their manner of speaking felt really vulgar, as if each word was being beaten into him. His breathing, which had stopped before, as well as his silenced heartbeat, and his trembling knees, suddenly started up again.

——He had entered a ferocious beast’s cage, the very place where he must not tread.

He had just kept running and running for his life.

He had run along the stone corridors, and tried to keep away from any places he had found familiar. He had followed a stairway he had found within a strange room, which had led him upstairs.

[138] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “There’s something difficult to translate into English in this sentence. The person first refers to him by “一人” to question if Subaru is by himself, but then thinks better of it, and puts Subaru down by using “一匹”. The detail here is that the former is the counter for people, and the latter is the counter for small animals.”

Perhaps he had been told about the staircase yesterday, or was it something like yesterday, maybe some few hours ago? It was all but lost to the oblivion of his memory.

He went up the long, long, long, long, incredibly long stairway, short of breath, up he went, and then.

And then, once he reached its end, he had found himself being glared at by a most terrible beast.

???: “Are ya even listenin’ to me?”

Subaru: “Hu.”

Suddenly, his breath was knocked out of him and he noticed he was looking right at the other person’s face, just before his eyes.

He had long, red hair, with a black eyepatch covering his left eye. He wore a kimono that exposed one of his shoulders and part of his chest, a white *sarashi*[139] wrapped around his exposed chest.

Just underneath his nose, this man was jabbing at him a thin, wooden stick. Though the tip of it was not at all sharp, yet he still perceived what was thrusted before him as Death, too.

Subaru: “——Hk.”

???: “Hey, don’t’cha fuckin’ ignore me.”

Subaru: “Wha, ah, eh?”

Without hesitating, he had obeyed his instincts and had tried to escape him.

But the moment he had tried to run back out of the room, he crashed straight into the man’s chest. The man had then pushed his raised forehead using his wooden stick, causing him to fall.

The back of his head bumped against the floor, bright flashes flew around his vision. Tears of pain started to flow out of his eyes.

[139] A long, white cloth that may be wrapped around the body under a kimono.

The pain of bumping against the floor, the pain of his head banging against the floor, it reminded him of the pain of being crushed.

Subaru: “Ah, ahh, ahhhhhhhhh…”

???: “Oyoy, ya prick, c’mon, ya cryin’? Why’d’cha start cryin’, ya prick? Did’cha fight with yer boyfriend downstairs, ya prick? Ya cryin’ ’cause ya were defeated?”

Subaru: “Guh… hiii… uuuu!”

???: “Good grief, what a hopeless bastard, OY!”

Whilst lying flat on his back, tears had begun to pour out of his eyes as he slowly relived the horror he had experienced. Looking at this spectacle, the long-haired man scratched his head roughly.

He crouched down beside his head, and,

???: “C’mon, tell me what happened. If ya’d like to ask somethin’, then I’m all ears.”

Subaru: “…Uh, ah?”

???: “You ran all the way to this place. Must be a real big deal, ya prick.”

He spoke those words with a sigh. The meaning of them was incomprehensible to him, and he simply reacted by blinking rapidly.

Just then, he felt like the being who had seemed vicious beyond compare slowly took on a more definite outline. Not only did it take on the shape of a person, but the emotions of a person and quintessence, began to tie together an actual image.

In his vision blurred by tears, the face of the man looking down towards him gradually became clearer——

???: “——No matter what’cha say, ya’re a fool!”

Subaru: “Gii, gah, ahhhHHHHH!?”

——With a cruel appearance, reminiscent of a bloodthirsty shark, the man had shoved the wooden stick right into his chest.

He had slid the pointed end of the stick between his ribs. He poked around and tickled the delicate internal organs behind his bones as if he was laboriously teasing him.

Sheer agony pierced his entire body, the wish to retch blood piercing him.

???: “The fuck ya doin’ runnin’ away, ya prick!? Even worse, what were ya tryin’ to pull, if before ya made a leg for it, now ya came to me, ya prick. I ain’t yer guardian, nor yer mate, ya prick. Aren’t’cha the one choosin’ who to flock with, ya prick. Do ya wanna fuckin’ die?”

Subaru: “Guh! Gah! Agh! Guhgyah!”

???: “Don’t reckon we got the sorta relationship where we get along by talkin’ to each other, ya prick. If things’d end up fine ‘n dandy with that, then it’s not like I’d’ve been called to this place to begin with. Come at me like ya feel like killin’ me. I’ll play ‘bout with ya. Finally.”

With evident irritation and hostility, the degree of his anger increased with every word he said. The hands of the man that was fiddling with his organs had a certain delicateness to them, and boasted exceptional precision.

He had been taught the importance and value of his organs with sharp, unbearable pain, so he well understood that.

If the man had been someone on edge, with the tendency to let his emotions get the best of him, or if his arms had been something other than precise and gentle, his guts would have exploded a long time ago.

That it had not ended up becoming like so, was down to the man’s awful talent.

His overwhelming resourcefulness as one who oppressed, being extremely blessed with violence, along with the talent necessary to exert it.

It was only thanks to that, that this act of barbarism was able to be carried out so properly.

——No. This place differed so much compared to the place he knew about.

???: “Beat it, small fry.”

Subaru: “Guh——”

The poking sensation in his guts faded away, and was quickly followed by the man’s foot violently kicking his side.

Rather than having kicked him with the side of his foot, he had punted him like as if he was a football. His body spun and tumbled around midair, and was sent out of the large room he had been in.

However, what was welcoming him as he flew out of the room was,

Subaru: “No, waaAAAAAAAAY…!”

He was tumbling down the stairs. With the sight of that scene in his mind, he instinctively dug his nails into the floor.

With a terrible screeching noise, the nails of his right hand, belonging to his middle and ring fingers were torn off their root. The nerves behind them became exposed and red blood wet the floor, but, somehow, he had managed to stop himself from falling down.

Subaru: “Guh, guhhhhh…!”

Immediately following the brief moment of relief, as he had in some way escaped the fall, he was assaulted by a sensation of scorching heat at the base of his nails. Gazing towards the sharp pain in his hand, he saw that his fingernails had been torn off like the open lid of a box; the nail on his little finger was also coming loose as well. Seeing this pain spurred his brain into overdrive.

Subaru: “It hurts… it hurts, it hurts, it hurts…”

Grasping his left hand with his declawed right one, he applied pressure to ease the pain, even if a little. Coming in drops, the blood oozing from his wounds flowed down his wrists, and left behind a trail of blood on the stairs as he stood himself up.

There was no courage in him to look back behind him anymore.

There was no sign that this ferocious beast was turning its attention over to him. If, to say, he had caught even a glimpse of it, he would have fallen down the stairs this time for sure, unable to put up with it.

He had stopped himself from experiencing the worst situation, but had now settled into the second worst case. So, what was he going do to do now?

Subaru: “Why…?”

Why was he in a place like this?

He had forgotten how to flee, his heartbeat had been engulfed by dread and paralyzed, and finally, his mind had turned to the wonders and nonsense of why he was here.

Though he should have been smashed up, he was here.

Though he should have been engulfed by scorching heat and vanished, he was still here.

It would have been nice if everything had been a dream or an illusion or the likes of that.

Subaru: “Precognitive… dreams…”

He had assumed that was what he had experienced.

The spectacle he had seen, the people that he had talked to, the conversations that had proceeded exactly as he remembered them, the events that should have occurred, he had seen them with his very own eyes.

Thus he had believed, that he would try and straighten out a theory as to why it had occurred, in his own way.

For sure, in some respects, he had even thought about it with such vagueness, as if it were none of his business, as if it were no skin off his nose.

Without knowing that the reward for such impudence and shallow thinking from him, would have been experiencing such intense pain.

Subaru: “————”

He then took notice he had crouched down on the spot

Drops of blood dripping down from him and soaking the stone staircase beneath him with a hue of red could be seen.

A feeling of wasted effort, a feeling of loss, a feeling of dismay; generally speaking, a lot of negative thoughts were spinning around his head.

Even if he investigated the conclusions spinning around in his head, he would find that they would all result in the same thought—— he did not know why he had experienced such things.

Subaru: "————"

Just a few hours ago, he was comfortably living his boring daily life.

There was no danger there, at the worst, he was worrying about his future. There was no one around threatening him, nothing to actually be taken seriously.

——He had only been in a place where he only needed to keep his face down under the gaze of his mother and father, at most.

Was that so wrong, he wondered.

He had continued to be an inconvenience to his mother and father. He had continued to disappoint them. He had not been a good son.

And thus, he had tasted the pain of death. Nevertheless, he had been driven to a situation now in which he had not died. The nails which had been peeled off were hurting him, he had been tortured by a strange man, he had been left all alone on this stairway. Was he crying?

In retrospect, had he thought about it, he would have done it more properly.

Subaru: "…I should have at least said «see you later»."

It had been a life full of regret.

Everything had gone wrong, resulting in only failure; thinking back on it, he wished to redo things. But that seemed too impossible a thing to perform with his own hands and feet. For the first time, something came to mind.

When I left home, I heard Mom's voice saying, "Take care".

I didn't reply to it.

Why?

——Because I didn't wash the cups left in the kitchen sink.

Subaru: "Guh, uh…"

I didn't wash the cup.

I didn't care to wash the brown stains that were stuck to it, after drinking that hot cocoa. If I'd responded to Mom's voice, if I'd started a conversation with her, I might've been told to wash that cup.

I ignored Mom's words because I didn't want to wash the cup.

I didn't say anything. I left the house without saying anything, and went to the convenience store, and spent money that I did not earn. And then found myself in this place.

I didn't say anything to Mom or Dad, I didn't wash the cup, and then I ended up here.

Without washing the cup, without even saying a word to my kind-hearted Mother, I may die in this place. I will die, having always caused trouble, without giving anything back, without even washing a cup.

Die, I'll die. I will die. I will most definitely die.

If I fall from that height, there'll be no saving me. I will definitely die.

Subaru: "…I'll, die."

I'll die.

Everything that lives eventually dies, and I'm going to die here.

In this place, where he knew no one.

Without Mom or Dad, surrounded by complete strangers, I'll end up becoming a filthy, bloody lump and die.

Subaru: "I'll die. I'll die. I'll… die. Die, die, die…"

He muttered this. As he muttered so, albeit strange, it felt like it became a little more distant.

It was just a temporary peace of mind. He was distracted. When put into words, it was not like anything would dramatically change.

Death would not change, loitering about while smiling, entangled with his fate.

Just now, it appeared to be taking the shape of a person. A dark shadow rose, laughing at him as if mocking him.

That face, which was stuck to the dark shadow was a face which seemed familiar, and he immediately realized who, among those he knew in this place, that familiar face belonged to.

Death, wearing his own face, was laughing, as it pointed at him, as he trembled.

Subaru: "Don't smile."

He glared at the shadow, and said this with a dark hatred.

The shadow continued to smile. It had not stopped pointing its finger at him.

Subaru: "Don't smile. Don't smile at me! This is nothing to smile at…!"

Standing up and grinding his teeth he approached the shadow standing against the wall.

The shadow still kept smiling. It had yet to stop pointing its finger at him.

Subaru: "Stop laughing. I will die. But not to you. You will not kill me."

The facial expression of the embodiment of Death changed for the first time.

It seemed like it had gotten angry that he was not at its mercy.

It seemed like this was the shadow's weak point, it was here that he would launch an incessant onslaught against it.

Subaru: "I will not be killed by you. I will die. It's certain that I will die! I will die! I'm dead! I'm already dead! I died and came back here, but I——"

——*won't be killed by you*.

It was in the moment he had tried to clearly speak those words out loud.

Subaru: "————"

His lips had stopped moving following his will. The next thing he noticed was that his eyes which had been glaring at the shadow seemed frozen, and the sensation of being completely separated from his body.

Why, even his ability to question it had been sealed, he had simply just succumbed to this sudden transformation in his body.

He could not move. His body—— no, it was not his body that had stopped moving. It was the very world itself that had ceased.

The black shadow that was standing in front of him had also halted all movement, its distorted expression of anger remaining frozen on its face.

In this world where he could not move, there was only one thing that moved. And that was——

???: "——I love you."

——It perhaps looked like a woman in black.

Darkness, it was a woman with slender limbs whose whole body was entirely dyed in black.

He did not know whether this woman's figure was made of darkness itself, or whether it was a woman dressed in black. He was not certain which one it was, it did not seem to make any sense to choose one.

In any case, it was a woman in black. It was as if she were wearing a black wedding dress, with a black veil that made it impossible to see both into it and out of it. This black veil completely concealed her face.

Woman in Black: "——I love you."

However, the words which emerged from the lips of the woman who was shrouded in darkness contained an unimaginably strong emotion.

Just how many emotions he could concentrate within, to get close to the words that slipped out from her lips?

There was quality, there was quantity, there was a sense of time, there was weight, there was worth, and that was just the general concept.

He did not know approximately how many people in the world had uttered "I love you" —— but if you were to take all of those "I love you's" and put them together, then it would surely be akin to this woman's "I love you".

And slowly, the woman who had been gently whispering her words of love moved her black arm towards his chest.

Slender fingers passed through his chest, his skin, his flesh, right through his bones and caressed his beating heart.

Subaru: "————"

Several minutes, dozens of minutes, he did not know how much time had passed, but his heart had been made aware of her presence ever since he had awakened—— but, he had never been more aware of it than in this moment.

He had never felt annoyed at her existence. Because——

Woman in Black: "——I love you."

She caressed his heart with the same passion that was found in her whispers.

But suddenly, a great shock coursed through him; his body, fearing pain, completely succumbed to it. His body being crushed by his fall, his soul burning and being scorched out of existence, even the pain of his guilty heart when thinking back to his mother, all of those pains seemed insignificant compared to this pain.

He wanted her to let him scream.

If he could shout himself hoarse, he could alleviate the pain a little. Rather than be faced only with pain, he would be able to escape some of the pain by thinking of things other than the pain he was in.

Now he was unable to do that. He could only face his pain.

Woman in Black: "– I love you."

Her love would not let go of his heart.

It was as if she had an everlasting desire for exclusivity, not allowing him to turn his attention to things other than herself.

——It was as if she was envious of everything around him.

Subaru: "——Haa."

His liberation was abrupt.

Subaru: "————"

Gasping, he collapsed on the spot.

With tears overflowing from his eyes, he was incapable of keeping hold of his continence. He felt a warm, wet feeling around his crotch, and urine began dripping down the stairway.

The dark shadow that had stopped continued to point at the shameful sight in front of it, and was laughing loudly.

As he watched the figure that was laughing, he realized that he had been deceived.

Since he had displayed behavior which had indicated weakness, he had been deceived into stepping on the tiger's tail that should not be tread on.

Subaru: "I…"

He could not resume his words.

He was holding his head, completely at his wit's end. Blood was still flowing from his peeled fingernails' wounds. Even his tears and the urine that was dripping from him seemed like punishment for his weakness and stupidity.

——Just kill me.

Those words went unvoiced. As for being killed, would he really be "killed"?

He heard the sounds of footsteps going up the stairs, and the sounds of anxious voices running up to where he was.

Until then, he continued to cry like a foolish child, smeared in his own filth and disappointment.

The ruins of Natsuki Subaru—— kept on crying.

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Setowi (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 40 – Forsaken by the Stars

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 3 “Hollow Shell”, Parts 1-2 (half-way)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

Everything was messed up.

Literally, so messed up, messed up.

He was found, brought back and questioned about what had happened.

Bit-by-bit, he found that the situation would get worse every time said something.

???: “All right, so Subaru really doesn’t remember anything?”

As he clutched his knees, the girl with the silver hair gazed down at him with a gloomy expression.

Beside her stood a young, sweet little girl who could not come to grips with what he had said, and reacted with shock.

???: “We were at a complete loss when we heard that you could not be found… by no means, did I think the situation would end up like this. It looks like we are facing a very difficult dilemma.”

The girl with a white fox scarf wrapped around her neck grumbled this in a stiff tone.

The Knight with the handsome face nodded and muttered the occasional “Yeah, that is correct[140]”, as she spoke.

???: “For how long are you going to be satisfied in exposing that unsightly appearance, Barusu?”

[140] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “For clarity, this term is what is being translated.”

Scowling at him as she said it, was the girl who had cleaned up the mess that had been caked on him. But, there was no great animosity in her words, moreover, there seemed to be a forlorn expression hanging over her.

???: “Master, Master. Something in the air seems to have become remarkably more gloomy, eh~? You need to smile mooore… Huh, what’s that? You stink of piss!”

The black-haired woman was laughing in good spirits, without seemingly understanding the situation here.

At the side of the black-haired woman, there stood a young girl who was stroking her braided hair. She gave him a sidelong glance which seemed to show barely a small glimpse of interest at the situation he was in.

Subaru: “————”

All these reactions were, if he were to broadly speak about them, reactions he overlooked.

Once, twice—— this made it thrice. He had disappointed them three times.

However, this time, he had soiled himself after trying to escape from this place. He had been found alone, huddled up and crying. There was no room for doubt that it was the worst situation so far.

——Even though he is the only one aware of the real facts behind this truly dreadful situation.

Subaru: “Heh.”

It made him laugh. The fact that he had repeated this same situation—— no, it had not only been once, but three times.

He had seen this scene the first time around, and then the second. Then on the third time he visited this scene, he finally grasped what sort of situation he was in.

——He had died twice.

Both times, most likely, from falling from the same place—— the first time, he had lost consciousness on the way down and because of that, he had not tasted the moment of death.

However, it had not been like this the second time. As he fell down, he had not perished quickly, instead he had tumbled and crashed against the staircase, having his whole body ruined.

He then finally died, but came back.

At the moment of death, he would return to the Green Room, and once again he would wake up and redo the day.

Die and return—— Return by Death.

That was the blessing which that God had bestowed upon Natsuki Subaru, in this parallel world.

Subaru: “Heh.”

For the second time, laughter leaked from him.

Whether one could objectively call it laughter was left to discussion, but it would suffice to say that for Subaru it was laughter.

There was nothing else he could do except laugh. He felt as if his tears had honestly dried up.

Crying also wasted his physical strength. He had died and then returned, it seemed like the physical strength he exerted before dying would be given back to him upon returning. This time he had literally soiled away his strength on awakening.

???: “Anyways, let Subaru rest until things settle down. Over time, we may see some change.”

At hearing the silver-haired girl’s proposal, he knew that his treatment had already been decided like so.

Was she thinking that he would lash out violently? Subaru’s persona had been exaggerated. He had been brought back to the Green Room under everyone’s supervision.

???: “I am afraid we cannot leave Rem here with Barusu as he is now. Ram opposes it.”

???: “…But, apart from finding out what caused this, our best bet at helping Subaru recover would be to rely on the Spirit of this room.”

???: “If that is the case… if that is the case, we will move Rem to another room. Ram will stay with her and look after her. Ram seems to be the only one who is worried about her right now.”

He wished he was in a place where there were no quarrels or clash of opinions.

Whatever it was, he had no options. Taking the initiative and having the willpower to do things such as resolutely overcoming this situation, the current Subaru did not have that within him.

???: “…Poor Rem.”

She uttered this so Subaru could hear her, just before she carried the sleeping girl, who looked exactly like her like two peas in a pod, out of the room.

Subaru had no idea about the true meaning behind her words. Nor did he want to.

???: “Subaru, stay here, quietly, in fact. Betty will surely find a way to return your memories, I suppose.”

Subaru: “————”

???: “I won’t let you cower here all alone.”

Just before she left the room, the young girl spoke those gentle words.

Her voice was tinged with grief, yet there also was a hint of noble determination within it. That voice was strong, confident in those words.

In that way, in response to her voice showing that she was concerned for him——

Subaru: “…Ah.”

Subaru shrunk back in an attempt to avoid her outstretched arms.

Seeing his reaction to this, the eyes of the little girl, with their characteristic pattern, swayed with hurt.

???: “————”

They were strangers. No matter what, they were strangers.

But for Subaru, they were not strangers. For those girls, the Subaru here was a stranger.

Their familiarity, their worry, and their deep affection was directed at the original “Natsuki Subaru”, and not at his current ruins. And, at the same time——

Subaru: “I have no reason to be killed…”

He had been left behind in the Green Room, alone. Subaru grit his teeth as he muttered this.

Still, it was not a good thing to turn towards those good feelings of comfort, or to blow off the bonds that he had supposedly accumulated over time, and the trust and deep affection he had no memory of. Not yet.

However, why did he have to bear the consequences of the murderous intent that “Natsuki Subaru” had accumulated towards him?

All the good things and the bad things, everything that was jumbled together, was not his own.

Despite this, why must he struggle and drown in this place?

Subaru: “I’m done with all of this…”

After a few hours of being alone, Subaru pushed his back up against the wall, and steadily got up.

Having clamped down on his lips too much, he spat out the mixture of blood and saliva that had piled up within his mouth. Then, slowly, he began walking towards the Green Room’s exit.

???: “——Mm.”

Behind Subaru, the only presence he could hear was the black lizard’s cry.

The cry sounded somewhat feeble, as if crying out in loneliness, however Subaru shook his head at that thought.

There was a limit to his stupidity, of the idea that a mere big reptile could be feeling loneliness.

Subaru: “Somebody will bring you food. Shush now.”

The lizard continued to let out its feeble cry despite what Subaru had said.

Without listening to it, Subaru dispelled his reluctant thoughts, and stepped out of the Green Room. He checked to his left and right, making sure the coast was clear and started walking away, stealthily.

Subaru: “Water, and where they keep the food…”

He knew that.

As he had accompanied them to fetch water, he knew where he could find it. He also knew where he could find food. The only other question he had, was how much of it should he bring?

Subaru: “————”

To be honest, there was something Subaru did not know.

What on earth had pushed Subaru down those stairs and robbed him of his life.

However, there was something that Subaru clearly remembered.

Back then, at that place, someone had pushed Subaru’s back. It had not been due to some ridiculous reason, such as being clapped on the shoulder from behind, or being blown off by a strong gust of wind.

He had certainly been pushed. He had been on the receiving end of definite, murderous intent. Natsuki Subaru had been murdered.

The suspects were seven: Emilia, Beatrice, Ram, Anastasia, Julius, Meili and Shaula—— Subaru did not know how many of them were his friends, nor how many of them were his foe.

After all, Subaru now had no way to deem if all of them were truly his acquaintances.

——In reality, couldn’t it be that all of them were assassins, gathered here at this Tower to kill Subaru?

Subaru: “If that’s true…”

Even if he brought all the food he could, his heart would not feel guilty about it.

正直なところ、スバルは容疑者の見当がつかない。だが、塔で一緒に行動していた誰かなのは間違いない。
明確な誰かの殺意に、ナツキ・スバルは殺されたのだ。誰が味方で敵なのか、スバルには判別が不可能だった。

However, at the same time, the first and second time he had met them, Emilia had called out to him in the same manner, and Beatrice had told him that they would look for a way to return his memories, and Ram had cried out refusing to believe that he had lost his memories. He doubted that they had been acting.

Subaru: "————"

It was impossible.

Having gone through all that horrible stuff, he had been killed not just once, but twice, yet Subaru doubted the girl and the others from the bottom of his heart, and despite that, he could not run away just for his own safety.

Subaru: "Shit, shit, half-assed son of a bitch…!"

He swore at his own disgraceful behavior, unable to chose, as he started to secretly pack away food.

He was collecting a so-called emergency ration, putting no consideration into what it would taste like. Of course, what was important now was that the food would fill him up, other particulars like taste were secondary, no, tertiary.

He had roughly taken enough food to last him three days. He had, in a similar fashion, drawn enough water and placed it in leather drinking pouches to carry along with him. Then——

Subaru: "There's a desert outside, but…"

He donned a cloak that had been stowed in the same place as the food. In terms of size and design, Subaru immediately noticed which one was his. The cloak was designed so when the front was clasped together, it could be pulled up to cover his mouth. It seemed like a perfect countermeasure against breathing in the desert sand.

And after collecting food, water and tools to help him in the desert, his preparations were complete.

Subaru: "I guess it is past the time where I've twice died…"

If he thought about it, the time he had spent huddled up in the Green Room should mean that he had perhaps already passed the time when he had been pushed off last time.

The effectiveness of Return by Death had immediately demonstrated its power. Like this, one-by-one, he could overcome his own death flags and continue walking the tightrope of life and death.

Subaru: "————"

He wished not to do that.

It would be better for him to not be in this place, than having to go through something like that.

Subaru jumped out of the room and initiated a job, heading towards where the spiral staircase was located using a mental map he had drawn in his head of the area. Twice he had been pushed down from this place. Naturally, his mind was screaming at him to get out of there. However——

Subaru: "——!"

Immediately after arriving at the spiral staircase and being momentarily enraptured by the scene in front of him, Subaru looked behind him and carefully examined whether the assassin was hiding somewhere behind him.

Luckily, because the time was different to last time, or because the assassin did not know where Subaru was, he could not find any trace of an arm stretched out preparing to push his back.

About now, everyone was probably at the Library where the memories of the dead slumbered, or they had headed upstairs to face the arrogant Examiner that awaited them—— the memory of having his internal organs messed with by this man resurfaced, and a feeling of wanting to vomit wells up within him.

Subaru: "As if you can challenge a guy who's like that…"

He was not human. Both in skill and personality.

By no means at all did it seem possible to win a challenge against such an opponent—— if that was indeed the case, why would he not overlook the fact that they had gone to face a fight they knew they could emerge victorious from.

Subaru: "Hell if I know!!!"

Since a little while ago, this enigma had kept popping up in his mind and had been trying to stop his feet. So what? He did not care.

Although she may have been gentle and kind, it may have all been a lie.

She may have acted worried, but behind her back, she may have been sharpening the blade of murderous intent.

At least she could have warned him of the possibility that a dangerous individual was lurking somewhere in the Tower.[141]

Subaru: “Well, what if the person they told me about is an enemy?”

Enemy, enemy was a word of ridicule.

In his everyday life in his world, relatively unaffected by conflict, the opportunity to utter a word such as “enemy” only existed within games. This world was one where one would be forced to use that word, as if it were only natural.

No, that was wrong. He did not want to be in this place. He did not want to stay here.

Subaru: “——!”

Subaru ran, biting down the unbearable irritation boiling within his chest.

He ran down the spiral staircase, heading down towards the out-of-sight Fifth Floor. There were many steps spiraling endlessly down the wall, and he cannot see the end of them as he goes downstairs.

He frantically ran down as fast as he could, puffing and panting, to the point that it almost seemed comical.

Still, he did not want to die.

Subaru: “I made it… Whew… Hk”

[141] Translation note from Witch Cult Translation: “Though no specific gender seems to be used in the Japanese source, I think these lines are referring to Emilia rather than everyone at once, hence the use of «she». His next line of speech seems to reinforce that.”

He had made it down the stairs to the Fifth Floor.

Unlike the Fourth Floor, the Fifth Floor was not divided into various rooms. Rather, it was like a single hall that occupied the entire space of the floor.

The only thing that was noticeable within the Fifth Floor was a set of stairs that led downwards to the Sixth Floor and——

Subaru: “A huge, door…”

Looking up at the huge door, he sensed a terrible feeling of oppression emanating from where it stood.

Subaru: “————”

Standing in front of the door, it felt like a strange overpowering sensation was clogging Subaru’s throat.

He felt a slight sandy breeze blow through. Perhaps the wind outside was blowing some sand into the Tower through the gaps of the door.

In the end, he was certain that this door connected to the outside.

Subaru: “If what Emilia and the others said was true…”

Using this door, he should be able to go to the desert outside.

Desert—— he had forgotten its official name, but nevertheless he would follow the sandy road and head towards civilization. That way at least, there should be no worries of having his life threatened by this cruel assassin.

The basics of crossing a desert were to travel at night, avoid sandstorms, and try to move towards one set direction—— this was the only knowledge he possessed on the matter.

Subaru: “I would bet that it’s far more likely that I’ll survive there, than in this place where it’s certain that I’m going to be killed.”

It could be said that this was not quite a normal decision to make.

However, whether or not this was an abnormal decision to come to, he did not think making it was a mistake. Under these circumstances, if he could not believe even in “himself”, then only darkness would await him.

He would never do such a thing like sitting in the dark, waiting for death.

Since his death, he had decided to fight back.

Subaru: “————”

He placed his hand on the huge door in front of him, and slowly pushed it with all his strength.

The size of that door was over ten times than that of Subaru himself. By all rights, even if Subaru were to push with all his might, it should be that, due to its weight, the door should not budge at all.

However, when he pressed the palm of his hand against the door, it easily pushed open as if it was mechanized.

Subaru: “Eh.”

Subaru let out a flat sigh and stopped pushing the door open.

Even if they had not noticed Subaru trying to sneak away till now, if he left the door completely open, then it was expectable that the girl and the others would notice.

Even if Subaru slipped out and managed to get away, he wanted to make sure to put in enough distance between them so they could not catch up to him.

Subaru: “————”

Stopping the door from opening, quietly, Subaru looked out from the gap in the door to the outside.

As soon as his eyesight adjusted, he witnessed a vast sea of sand swallowed by the creeping darkness of nightfall.

Subaru: “…It really is a desert, eh.”

He attempted to squint his eyes so he could see what laid beyond the horizon, but for naught.

In this environment where there were no signs of any shelter, what existed at the end of the horizon was unable to be seen. There was no way for Subaru to know how far it stretched.

However, no matter how far this desert went on for, it certainly could not go on forever.

If he were to take a step forward, it would be one step closer to the outside world.

If he were to get closer to the outside world—— wouldn't that be a step closer to his original world?

Subaru: "————"

For a moment, Subaru's feet remained glued to the Tower.

He would probably, surely, leave this place. It made him feel a bit guilty to do this, as he would be leaving behind those without any ill intentions towards him.

Subaru shook off these feelings. His attachment to go outside, to his original world, made him do so.

He did not want to be here. Natsuki Subaru would return home, because that was where his Mom and Dad awaited him.

Subaru: "So…"

With a firm step forward, Subaru passed through the gap he had opened in the door.

Stepping on the sand, he noticed that his feet sunk into the sand more than he had thought they would. Taking his initial steps with quite a lot of force, Natsuki Subaru stepped outside, into the outside world. And——

Subaru: "…Huh?"

A violent explosion from underneath his shoes suddenly launched Subaru high up into the air.

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Subaru had been thrown from his back onto the ground, making him black out.

He was in a complete state of panic—— Subaru now no longer knew whether being in a state of panic was more normal than being in a state of normalcy.

Subaru: “What the…”

…*hell happened*. While spitting sand from his mouth, Subaru did not possess the leisure to continue those words.

This was due to the imposing figure that now stood right before his eyes, presenting an answer to what the hell had happened.

Subaru: “————”

Right in front of Subaru’s eyes, with the background dyed by the night, a huge shadow regarded him.

It had a huge, limbless body, with slimy skin. It looked ferocious, with cruel fangs lining its mouth—— it appeared like an earthworm to Subaru.

A terrible, gigantic earthworm. In length, it stood not less than ten meters tall—— it was an earthworm-monster.

Subaru: “Wh…”

Was this a world full of monsters?

Every single scene he had witnessed had been disconnected from reality, and had not given Subaru’s heart a chance to calm down.

And now, the latest crisis was drawing near to him, not giving him any chance to crouch down and lament his fate.

Subaru: “This, fucking…!”

Picking himself up, covered in sand, Subaru shook his head.

Most likely it had been this earthworm who had struck him earlier and blown him away, because he was standing on its territory. That, or he had simply been standing in the place where it had emerged to take a breath.

Either way, the earthworm had knocked Subaru down onto the sand, and moreover——

Subaru: “It’s not going to leave me be…!”

Understanding that in this situation he was at an overwhelming disadvantage, Subaru looked at his surroundings.

He had barely taken four steps since leaving the Tower. Although cowardly, there were plenty of options to pick from, such as jumping back into the building and living.

However, as he looked around, Subaru cursed his luck. He had been blown away by the earthworm’s blow and had rolled across the sand, away from the Tower. The huge earthworm stood in between Subaru and the Tower, so if he were to try and get back to the Tower, he would have to go past the earthworm’s huge body.

Subaru: “So…”

Even if he were to run into the desert, he expected the earthworm to eventually catch up with him.

Firstly, this may not be the only earthworm. Considering its size, there was a decent chance that this earthworm was the lord of the desert, although even one half its size would pose quite a threat as well.

Not to mention, if he were to be attacked by a herd of them——

Subaru: “In fact, was the option of escaping not even realistic?”

He hated the kindness of this world, in that it educated quickly and thoroughly.

And, it seemed like the earthworm had decided what to do about Subaru, who had been busy trying to puzzle how to get out of this situation.

Slowly, the earthworm turned its eyeless head towards him and opened its gaping maw. There was a curved horn on its head, quite the surreal sensation for him.

Subaru: “One shot, just one shot. Just one one shot, one shot, one shot…”

Pulling up his anti-sand cloak to his neck, Subaru kept an eye out for the earthworm’s actions.

He pulled his arm to the front, and calculated the timing for him to deliver his blow. He suddenly noticed that the wound where his nails had been ripped off on his right hand had closed, and that the nails had started to regenerate.

Had it been healing magic, or the effects of the Green Room? And while distracted by that——

Earthworm: “——KRUAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!”

The gigantic beast let out a terrible, shrill cry which he could have never imagined coming from such a thing. The earthworm had then leapt, almost as if it was flopping, towards Subaru.

When Subaru heard its roar against the howling of the wind, for a split second he felt a strange sensation, like his body was acting on its own accord.

Subaru: “————”

The earthworm had leapt at him, however he rolled towards his right side and dodged its attack.

He had not been thinking of anything else. It was as if he could see an illusion of himself, on what to do next. He had simply followed what the illusion had done, and moved his body alike[142].

And just like that, he had moved out of the earthworm’s attack.

Subaru: “——Tchhhh!!”

A large amount of sand mushroomed up into the air, followed by a shockwave right beside him.

Whilst experiencing the aftermath of its attack, Subaru rolled over the sand, still following the illusion of his own consciousness.

[142] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “I think, from my take on this line, it’s a highly metaphoric way of describing things. I think the author is saying that Subaru’s thought process blanked out for a second, and it was like he subconsciously envisioned what to do (to avoid the worm). And instinctively, he moved out of its path as if following a ghostly illusion.”

Subaru: “…Haa!”

His body was far more agile than he remembered it to be.

A split second after, what crossed through his mind was the year “Natsuki Subaru” had passed, which Subaru had no recollection of. There was a trace left of the experience “Natsuki Subaru” had accrued surviving in this harsh environment.

Right now, he was not thinking anything about the fact he had made full use of that.

Subaru: “At this rate——!!”

Rolling forwards, with the nimbleness and vigor his precursor had left him, Subaru righted himself up and ran as fast as possible towards the Tower’s front door.

In this moment, it was all about clinging onto what was in front of his eyes.

He knew that he would return to an environment of shadows and suspicion, as well as that he will be tormented by the fear of death, were he to make it back to the Tower. But still, he would rather choose that, than ending up becoming this huge earthworm’s feces.

Subaru: “————”

He could not afford to look back behind him, but it should be that the earthworm, having plunged into the desert, should not have enough dexterity to be able to switch over and catch up with him immediately.

He was only a few meters away from where he was running towards——

Subaru: “Hk.”

Just now, instead of the earthworm’s head, the earthworm’s tail had broken through and appeared from underneath the sand at Subaru’s feet. The soil underneath him violently exploded, the momentum of the tail striking his feet hoisting Subaru’s body up into the air again.

Subaru: “Oh, ah.”

Whilst revolving around in midair, and flailing his limbs about, Subaru gazed what was underneath him.

Beneath his eyes, he saw that the earthworm was opening its large mouth, preparing itself to greedily devour his body.

——He had underestimated it.

He was naive to think that he, having living in a world similar to a greenhouse, could outsmart the wild animal that had lived in this harsh environment and gotten so huge.

Reckless, he had been reckless. He would pay the price of his own impudence with his life.

Subaru: “NO!”

Whilst falling, he shouted this out, like a trapped insect struggling to escape a spider’s web[143].

Die, would he die again? If he died, he did not know if he would even remain dead. If he was to die and it ended here, what would happen? Could he bear it?

If he were to be thrown forever into never-ending darkness like this. Could he bear it?

Subaru: “DON’T WANT THAAAAAAT!!”

He screamed and stretched his hand out to the night sky for help.

There was nothing to reach out to. Even at the ends of the sky, which was blurred behind some wispy clouds, he could not see the stars that were supposed to be there; Subaru was falling alone.

He had been abandoned by the star bearing his own name[144], about to be swallowed into the monster’s belly, blinking out and disappearing. Such despair——

——Suddenly, a surge of white light appeared.

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[143] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “The metaphor used here is different, being «羽根をもがれた虫のように足掻きながら» or literally «struggling like an insect with its wings plucked off», but believing that its gist was understood, I replaced it with an English equivalent.”

[144] There is something to be said here that Pleiades is not a star, but an asterism, but it’s what Tappei wrote. As you may be aware already, in Japanese, the asterism “Pleiades” is called “Subaru” (昴).

Subaru: "————"

A surge of white light rushed forward and blew away the face of the earthworm that had opened its large mouth.

Literally, the impact had pierced the earthworm's face, with its large head being warped in such a fashion that it almost looked like it had been turned into *amezaiku*[145].

And then, in a split-second, it blew up. Chunks of dirty flesh and blood sprayed out of the earthworm's head as they flew off.

The head that should have swallowed Subaru was gone, and the earthworm's huge body quaked violently. However, before its body toppled over, Subaru's own body crashed off the top of the headless worm.

With a heavy shaking movement, it had felt like as if he had fell onto a hamburger patty just before it was cooked.

Its gaping wound, its internal organs, and its flesh and blood were the things that had cushioned Subaru's body. He had been given his life in exchange for the discomfort stuck in his hair.

He coughed and spluttered violently, realizing that inside his mouth was some foul liquid which made him want to vomit. Meanwhile, the earthworm's remains were slowly sinking into the sand—— Or rather.

One after the other, light flashed across his field of view, end every time it does, the earthworm's remains were shot through.

It was shot through, burst open, segments of it were sliced off, bits of it flew about; the earthworm was being cut into ribbons. It was only by coincidence that none of these flashes of light hit Subaru, which you could say was a stroke of luck in such a bad situation. However, eventually——

Subaru: "——Ah."

Subaru noticed that its body, which had been shook by these impacts, had now been strewn across the sand. Subaru was now lying with his back on the sand, his whole body stretched out.

[145] Amezaiku is Japanese candy craft artistry. For more information, see here.

Subaru: "————"

Up above him, he gazed at the same starless sky he had gazed when being flung up by the earthworm.

By some twist of fate, even now that he had managed to cling onto his life, the sky had not changed, and yet "Subaru" had still been abandoned[146].

Being amazed, being wanted, being abandoned, being hated, being befriended, being kept away.

Did he want to live? Did he want to die? Did he want to be here or not?

Subaru: "What should I do…! If you know, tell me…!"

There was no one around; covering his face, he yelled this towards the empty sky.

He received no reply. Who was it that Subaru wanted to hear the answers from the most? It was probably——

Subaru: "——Answer me, Natsuki Subaru."

Saying this in a miserable voice, Subaru sighed and turned his body to the side.

There had been no particular reason why he had happened to turn his body.

——But that tiny movement had barely saved Subaru's life from the white light which grazed his ear, and struck the ground next to him.

???: "*DZZZZZZZZ*"

Something had grazed past his right ear with tremendous force.

He clasped his hand to the ear which was throbbing in pain, and rolled to the side. As the blood dripped out from his ear, he saw what had caused the pain.

[146] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "He is not referring to «Natsuki Subaru» here. His name is written in Kanji, so he is referring to himself by the constellation (昴)."

A long, narrow, glowing object, reminiscent of a stinger, was stuck in the ground.

Subaru: “What is…”

This. As soon as he reached out to touch it, the white stinger turned into dust.

And, right after that, Subaru’s field of view shook.

Subaru: “————”

It shook greatly. From top to bottom.

Whether it was because of an earthworm wriggling, or whether it was because the last stinger had stabbed into it, the ground underneath Subaru’s buttocks was collapsing. He was sinking down along with the surrounding earth.

Subaru: “UAAAAAAAAAaaaaa!!”

His fingers slipped through the sand as he fell, trying to find anything to hold onto. Rather like an insect falling into an anthill, Subaru’s body sunk to the bottom of the sandy floor, unable to do anything about it.

His arms and legs were buried. He was unable to move them. Turning his head up, he desperately gasped for air.

His whole body was being swallowed by the sand, he frantically attempted to fight against the premonition that he was about to be buried alive.

Subaru: “Someone, someone, help me…”

Subaru’s entire body was swallowed by the sand, sinking, sinking, with the following words never having been granted form.

And the stars did not even take one single notice at the miserable, struggling "Subaru"[147].

[147] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "Again, not to be confused with «Natsuki Subaru». It's referring to the constellation again, so he is calling himself by his star-name. It's saying that the stars above (which are presumed to be hidden by wisps of clouds or Miasma, which is why he couldn't see them earlier) did not even care about the sinking Subaru (i.e. as if he was a sinking star)."

Arc 6 Chapter 41 - Scent of Peace

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 3 “Hollow Shell”, Parts 2 (half-way)-3 (half-way)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——His consciousness returned, and the first thing he felt was a difficulty in his breathing.

Subaru: “Cough.”

Feeling something unpleasant collected in his mouth, he coughed violently—— spitting out sand and forcing open his heavy eyelids. He had lost consciousness.

He had not dozed off, it had been a forced loss of consciousness, brought about by an irresistible wave.

He felt sand trapped within his eyelashes. While fighting against that, Subaru wondered what had happened and attempted to recall what had occurred to him just before.

If his memory was correct, there had been a terrible confusion, and after that he had attempted to leave the Tower. There was no doubt that he had managed to leave the Tower without being disturbed by anyone, but——

Subaru: “The earthworm… the white flash of, light…”

Recalling the terrifying incident that had happened just after that, and recalling how the impacts had continued to rain down one after the other, Subaru seemed quite suspicious at whether he was actually alive.

Had it been only luck, that he had survived all these abnormal events he had been dragged into?

However, even if he were to die, it was doubtful that he would truly remain dead. Though, that was what the current Natsuki Subaru was, an unwanted foreign being.

Subaru: “After the stingers, I fell right into the termite nest…”

He remembered that the ground beneath him had collapsed and he, along with the earthworm’s gigantic carcass, had been swallowed by the ground. He had managed to stretch out his head to secure some oxygen, however even his head had been swallowed up by the sand, and caused him to fade out of consciousness.

It seemed as if he should have died of suffocation, but that had not been the case.

Subaru: “This place… is this underground area beneath the desert?”

Looking around, he was unable to locate a source of light in this space; the darkness was so thick that he could barely see anything nearby.

Opening his heavy eyelids, he took the palm of his hand out of the sand, and pushed it to his front. Only barely could he see that it was there. The world around him was too vague to let him see the existence of this lifeline.

——It really seemed as if he just barely remained in the world of the living.

Subaru: “…Stop shivering, damn idiot.”

Thinking that much, Subaru attempted to slowly move his arms and legs in an attempt to release his body, which was trapped in the sand, from the heavy pressure that enveloped him. The feeling that he could not breathe was due to the bed of sand that had swallowed him from his waist down. He was quite lucky that his upper body had not been buried.

One could say that this process of extraction could be likened to trying to raise a flag on a sand dune without causing the flag to fall over. Subaru carefully extracted himself out of the sand, moving it away, making sure to avoid making any poor movements so he would not bury himself in the sand again.

Subaru: “————”

After barely escaping from the sand, he felt a great sense of fatigue overpower him.

It was likely because his body temperature had been sapped by the cold sand, along with the continuous pressure it had exerted on him. The fact that he was incapable of grasping how long he had been out cold was horrible.

Subaru: “Guess I was lucky that when I was out cold another earthworm didn’t come and munch on me…”

While speaking, Subaru became aware that his throat was parched, and moved his hand to his waist.

Back when he escaped from the Tower, he had fastened some leather pouches containing enough water to cross the desert. But, his fingers which had been trying to grab that water, closed around thin air. Despite fumbling around several times for them, he could not find the leather pouches.

Subaru: “I should have expected this, considering I was buried from my waist down…”

It seemed like the water pouches had come off upon being swallowed by the sand. As well as that, it looked like the bags filled with his emergency rations had disappeared as well. Although it indicated he was in a fatal situation, he remained calm at heart.

Already, his heart had been paralyzed by this cruel situation; it was perhaps becoming absurd to react every single time like this.

Subaru: “At least, it’s gotta be nearby… Eh?”

Getting on his knees, he fumbled around the bank of the sand mound that he had just gotten out of.

It was quite a large amount of sand. He did not expect to find it, but as if it was just mere consolation, he felt something soft exactly where his body had slipped out of. Confirming it with his fingers, he was surprised to find that it was the leather pouch that he had been looking for. But,

Subaru: “It’s empty, so why am I even surprised by this again…?”

Feeling the pouch with his hands and gauging its weight, he realized the contents are empty. Just in case, he placed the opening of the leather pouch to his lips, but only a few drops trickled onto the tip of his tongue.

Even if it was just a little bit of water, right now, every drop of it was precious. Enjoying that sensation on his tongue, Subaru placed the leather pouch to his waist and decided that he would feel around his surroundings again.

Subaru: "——?"

Considering he had found his drinking pouch, there was also a chance that he would find his food. But such an expectation had been betrayed, just like when he had found his water.

——His food had fallen out and was now scattered all around the mound of sand he had been buried in, almost as if it had been messily eaten up.

Subaru: "————"

Due to it being dark, his vision around the sand-bed was poor.

However, he could recognize that the food that he had brought now remained scattered around it. The crumbling pieces left on top of his palm had not maintained their original shape—— in concrete terms, he recognized that the food was now inedible, and so left it there, scattered.

Gulping, Subaru's throat ached in thirst.

Subaru's food was strewn around his surroundings. This fact clawed at Subaru's mind, as if it was scratching him with nails, as he desperately tried to remain calm.

Subaru started to sweat profusely, wasting precious water, as fear filled his heart as he thought of being preyed on by earthworms.

Originally, this huge earthworm had crawled out of here, so this was the monster's habitat, so to speak.

The earthworm, who must have been the leader among them, had died, but it pose no surprise to him if there were other monsters with which it had cohabited dwelling in this passageway.

Subaru: "I need to leave this place…"

As soon as possible, Subaru thought.

However, he was aware that his surroundings could not be perceived well. He started to crawl using his hands and knees, relying on feeling his way using the ground beneath him, never mind even the walls. He could merely flee crawling on his hands and knees, making sure to check for ground, walls, a path, his own being.

Subaru: “Ow, it hurts… shit, ouchhhh…”

His right ear had been grazed by the white stinger, the fingernails on his right hand were still halfway through regenerating, and the organs in his body were still aching him. While suffering from all this pain, Subaru was crawling out, trying to escape this place.

Even if, beforehand, he had not known exactly what the heck he was running away from, now, he must do anything to get away from this strange being.

Anyway, in order to get away from this unfamiliar horror, he had no choice but to continue his escape.

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Subaru: “————”

Smelling something, Subaru moved his hands and feet forward towards it, as if being guided by it.

The smell gradually became stronger, eventually becoming strong enough to be regarded as a reliable sense. It guided Subaru deeper within.

——It had been a little over an hour since Subaru had begun to crawl out of this place.

Whilst escaping, Subaru had accidentally slid down the sand-bed quite a few times and had also been obstructed by walls in his way on this trackless path. Sometimes, sand had rained down from above which had caused him to react by rolling over in fright.

Whilst doing that, Subaru realized that he was within a cave, underneath the desert.

Although that he had noticed had not been any great salvation in fact, it did bode an omen to its real meaning.

——A strange, yet alluring scent suddenly drifted into his nostrils.

By no means could he call such a strange thing sweet-smelling.

In a typical situation, smells were generally considered to be of lower priority and had less value when trying to figure out a situation. However, considering that his sight was sealed by darkness, and he could not tell what was happening in the world around him, this sudden stench felt extremely fresh to him.

Therefore, Subaru started to crawl, using the wall to feel his way towards the source of the scent, just like when a young child first began to learn how to walk using walls.

Sniffing with his nose, he looked exactly like a dog following a trail towards the depths of the cave—— no, to the depths, or maybe the entrance of the cave, he could be sure where this scent was leading him towards.

Subaru: “Haa, haa, haa…”

Without even noticing, Subaru had stuck his tongue out and begun to pant heavily, exactly like a dog would.

He had heard that dogs would stick their tongues out and pant in an attempt to cool their body down, but Subaru did not really equate this comparison to his current gesture. The reason why Subaru had lolled his tongue out, imitating something that a dog would do, was because he wanted to increase the amount of knowledge he could obtain from his surroundings, by sensing the flow of the air on his tongue.

Subaru: “————”

In just a few hours spent in black, Subaru had applied the methods that creatures use to move about in the dark. Naturally, his half-baked attempt was completely different to how it occurred in reality.

The darkness was unchanging and did not provide Subaru with any hints of what was around him. In this lonely area, all he could hear was his own breathing and the faint scratching noises of himself paddling across the sand—— however, this felt comfortable to Subaru now.

——It was terrifying, it was horrible, but one way or another, he must manage it.

It was the first time he had naturally embraced this natural human feeling.

Right now, Subaru loved this silence and this darkness and this “lonely” space where no one was around.

Right here, no one would hurt him.

Right here, all he needed to do was to keep floundering around to try and escape.

Right here, he need not think about anything, there were things to do.

A feeling of complacency, similar to the feeling one would get if by letting a muddy river sweep them along, embraced Subaru’s heart.

If he could just melt away into it, that would be no problem, wouldn’t it?

——In this manner, he had submerged himself in thought about it whilst escaping from his fatigue and habit.

Subaru: “Damn it, what is this…”

Subaru had steadily crawled through the dark cave.

On his way, he had come across a fork in the road with a path going left and the other one right. He anxiously deliberated on which path to choose, and in the end had decided on the right path. From then on, there had been a long, long journey whereby he followed the scent.

Would there be a place where he could find relief at the end? Would he reach somewhere which had light? Even though such a prospect was not necessarily true, Subaru had pushed forward without any concern for this. However——

Subaru: “There’s a dead-end right here…”

The path he had followed had steadily narrowed. After going up a slope, Subaru had found a narrow path awaiting him, which could only be traversed by literally crawling; at the end of it was a wall of sand—— ultimately, it was also where the source of the scent ended.

Subaru: “Why did I even come all the way here… No, wait a sec.”

Angry at the blockage in his path, Subaru had been about to strike the wall of sand, but caught himself. He racked his brains at the current contradiction in front of him, having followed the scent all the way here.

Subaru had unmistakably arrived here by following the scent lingering in the air.

The scent had been wafted in by a draft, and had certainly arrived all the way to Subaru far below ground. In other words, if the wind had flowed from here, it meant that this wall of sand could not be a dead end.

The draft had surely flowed into the cave from the outside.

Subaru: “If that’s so…!”

Frantically palming his surroundings, Subaru shuffled back a bit. He fumbled around the dead-end path for anything.

He had not missed anything on the left, right, front or bottom. Then, where had he not looked?

——He had been forsaken by the stars, had he been afraid to look up?

Subaru: “——There it is.”

After more than an hour of backtracking, his hand that had been touching the ceiling brushed against the air, and Subaru’s eyes sparkled.

Standing up, he put his arms up. They did not hit the ceiling. Even when he put his shoulders up, they did not hit the ceiling. There was a hole, more than twice as large as Subaru’s waist, and so his body would fit through it easily.

In other words, if he were to push up using his back and legs, he should be able to climb out.

Subaru: “————”

A gentle breeze was flowing from somewhere above the hole. Until now, Subaru had clung on only to the target that he had been pursuing, the scent. It was flowing in from the wind above to the underground area below that he was in.

There was no choice now but to climb up as Subaru had sniffed to make sure of it.

Subaru: “Guh… Nuh… Hk.”

Placing his body by the hole, he pushed his back against the wall. Of course, because the wall had been fashioned out of sand, if he made even a slight mistake in the angle in which he applied his body weight, he would risk having the wall, and his plan, collapse.

Being careful not to do just that, he placed his feet against the wall too. Subaru thrust his feet and buttocks up, and slowly climbed out of the hole.

Subaru: “————”

Fortunately for him, there were some grooves embedded within the wall in some places, which to an extent helped Subaru support himself, as he made his solitary climb.

Perhaps, a person possessing superhuman physical ability could simply put their feet on one of the grooves and get out of the hole by merely jumping.

Subaru: “Huu.”

However, Subaru was not in possession of such physical abilities, thus he had no choice but to continue steadily climbing up.

Still, it seemed like his body had been trained in the time Subaru did not recall, and was suited to withstand activities like this.

He gradually adapted to his body having a new engine, just like as if he was getting used to driving a new car. He had gotten the hang of it by the time he had managed to pull half of himself out of the hole, and had established that he was a pretty good climber.

However, before being able to show the full extent of his ability——

Subaru: “——I’m out.”

He did not know roughly how many meters he had climbed up the wall, but taking a look at it, he had climbed up to such a height that, if he were to fall down, he would die from the resulting fall.

With this self-praise in mind, Subaru finally succeeded in climbing up the wall.

Subaru: "————"

He did not feel any great emotion about it as he thought he would have. That was not down to him thinking anything tedious such as "when you go and do it, this is how it is".

All he thought was—— Climbing all the way up the wall was a piece of cake when faced with this.

Pulling himself out of the hole, treading onto fresh sand, Subaru stood up.

And, taken aback, he muttered a brief word about the majestic structure standing in front of him.

Subaru: "——A door."

——Standing right there before him, without relying on anything else for support, was only a strange door.

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——Subaru was at loss at what to do about the door that was standing right before him.

Subaru: "I can see it."

It seemed that the hole Subaru had gone through did not lead directly to the surface.

He was most likely still inside the cave—— if there were different tiers to the cave, then the place he had probably dropped down to was B2F, and now he was at B1F.

Rather than it being a large-scale area, that space had been hidden by the means of something that could be dubbed as a stopgap. The room had nothing that resembled walls or floors, it only had a single door which was standing there stock still.

Could there be anyone at all who could fathom what this meant?

Subaru: "——Other than me, that is."

While regarding the door, Subaru announced this with extreme arrogance.

Placing his hand on his chest, and widening his eyes, he was clearly aware of what the door he had suddenly encountered was—— it was his door.

He had a strange confidence about it.

He was confident that this door was his own.

The draft that had flowed to the underground area he had been in, the scent that had been carried in by the breeze, he had followed it all the way here.

Everything was bringing Natsuki Subaru to this place.

And now, the door that stood in front of his eyes was glowing. Even in the darkness it was asserting its presence, longing for the moment when Natsuki Subaru's hand would open it.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru walked up to the door with a spring in his step, as if he was about to go and caress something beloved, like a sweetheart.

It looked like a set of wooden double-doors that were about twice as high as Subaru. Straining his eyes, he could see that at the center of the double-doors was a doorknob that allowed it to be opened. He also noticed a strange pattern in that particular area.

——There, seven jewels could be seen.

Subaru: "——Wha."

Whilst looking at the jewels, Subaru touched the door.

And just as he did, the jewels on the door started to shine—— four of them.

Four of the seven jewels were gleaming brightly, welcoming Natsuki Subaru's visit——

——The door's master would not admit the visit of those not in possession of the keys[148].

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——In the wink of an eye, after he blinked, Subaru did not know where he was.

Subaru: "Wha."

Breathing a stunned sigh, Subaru gazed down at his hands.

He could see. Of course. There was light here, there was color. He could see where he was standing. He was standing on a stone floor—— there was stone, on the floor.

Subaru: "——Tch."

Subaru's body stiffened as he glanced around his surroundings in confusion. Around him, there were reddish-brown walls, walls, walls—— they were the walls of the circular Tower. The huge door behind him led to the outside.

He was inside the Tower—— on the Fifth Floor of Pleiades Watchtower.

He had come back to the very place he had resolutely tried to leave.

Subaru: "There's…"

…*No way*, he could not continue. His words would never come out.

It must have happened just after he had blinked. In a split second, Subaru had ended up standing in this place. He could break out of his shock, feeling dizzy, his feet starting to wobble.

He was barefoot, his shoes had come off. Subaru grinded his teeth together.

[148] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Unclear if Keys is plural or not. Based off context, it likely is plural".

It was not the case that he had been completely stunned by this place. He could run away right now—— No.

Subaru: “Why should I run away?”

Subaru looked up above him with extreme fury, murky feelings boiling up inside him.

A burning hate like molten magma was zealously whirling inside Subaru without him even being aware of it.

His time alone had ended, the peaceful darkness had ended, clinging to that scent had ended—— his hatred was one without rhyme or reason, towards the fact that everything in his possession there, had been wrenched away from him.

Subaru: “————”

Why did Subaru have to run away?

Someone was planning to kill him and had once, no, twice reaped his life. Why would he want to be in a place, where people shamelessly masqueraded as good people, hiding that fact under a guise of tranquility?

——In this Tower, there were only suspects.

Did he want the culprit to be inside? Had he escaped because he had been unable to do it?

He had been an idiot, he had been an idiot, he had been an idiot, he knew jack shit.

——No matter which of the suspects was the right one, he could just crush them all until he found the right one.

Subaru: “————”

Luckily, all those bastards were careless around Subaru.

He would find out whether it was only the culprit that would display caution around Subaru—— though, the culprit had no way of knowing that they were being suspected by Subaru.

That was the advantage Subaru owned here, having once died.

Once he had realized that he had died, he knew that someone was trying to kill him.

The only thing he had to do was to murder them before they committed that act of murder again.

Subaru: “Hiha.”

A wicked grin appeared on his face, and Subaru covered his mouth with his hand, stifling his laughter.

The idea for his gratification had just suddenly leapt out from inside his head. Subaru had received a blessing from the heavens to pick up and rescue himself.

Subaru: “————”

For that to come to pass, he needed some weapon to set matters straight swiftly.

Once he had reached and settled on that conclusion, Subaru acted quickly. Subaru rushed down the spiral staircase—— he was going down towards the Sixth Floor below him.

It was fuzzy in his memory, but he recalled that the Sixth Floor was the lowermost floor of this Tower. When Subaru and the others—— no, when the original “Natsuki Subaru” and the others had come to the Tower, they had borrowed on the strength of lizards to cross the desert, using things that looked rather like horse-drawn carriages.

Of course, if there were such things lying about, they would come in useful for an “emergency”.

Subaru: “————”

Arriving at the lowermost floor, Subaru found the carriage he was looking for, however his feet stopped there.

The reason for why he reacted like that was because, just beside the carriage—— collapsed there was a huge lizard, already dead.

Its head was missing. Its body from the neck down was lying on the floor. Had the blow that had decapitated it been that powerful? The head that had been blown off was nowhere to be seen nearby.

Instead, blood had flowed out of its huge body, staining the ground below. He found that a considerable amount of time had passed since this tragedy had occurred, since the blood had dried already.

Subaru: "——The stingers."

What Subaru had thought about in this moment was that it looked a lot like how the mysterious white stingers had blown up the head of the earthworm which he had battled against immediately after leaving the Tower.

This impression was consistent with the remains of the lizard collapsed here. Then, that attack had been from someone inside the Tower—— most likely, one of the suspect's attacks.

Thus, the lizards themselves had been treated just like cattle, in their pitiful lack of burial too——

Subaru: "——Does this mean they aren't trying to hide their true colors anymore?"

It seemed like his opponent had been quick-tempered, and rather than giving Subaru a chance to escape, they had instead delivered a decisive blow.

Whilst trembling at this fact, Subaru went inside an intact carriage—— it showed signs of having been used as a place to sleep. Tearing through the inside, Subaru found a big knife in one's baggage.

Dare he say it had some purpose, something akin to a survival knife?

Rather than it being an all-out weapon, the large knife was probably good for cutting through obstacles—— but, in this situation, it would still be a splendid weapon that would fulfill Subaru's aims.

Subaru: "I don't know who the enemy is, but…"

——He would show them.

With his body blazing with dark feelings, Natsuki Subaru headed upstairs, knife in hand.

A twisted smile curved across his cheeks, boosted by his hatred.

If he wanted to be saved, if he wanted to escape, he must believe that anything he murders was justified; and with that, he would proceed.

——Below his smiling cheeks, he did not notice the tears of fear streaming down his face.

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Norvak (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 42 – Tower of the Dead

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 3 “Hollow Shell”, Parts 3 (half-way)-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

Natsuki Subaru slowly continued up the stairway, stepping firmly as he resumed his ascent.

With madness filling his eyes, fury raging in his chest, and a knife in one hand, he continued walking upwards.

Subaru: “Kill, kill, kill, I’ll kill you. Definitely gonna kill you…”

That whisper, rather like a rasp, were the words of an endless curse.

If power dwelled in the might of words, then the sheer amount of curses Subaru was spewing out would indeed bolster his deed.

“Kill”, each time he said it aloud, he felt as if the power lodged in his knife increased.

Subaru: “Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill…”

While muttering this, his sight would occasionally blur over.

Maybe it was a combination of his exhaustion from spending hours crawling around the area beneath the desert, and his fears. For a moment, Subaru’s head felt strangely heavy, making him shake his head a few times.

Now was not the time to collapse in a place like this.

After all, the place he was in was an environment full of people who were a danger to him. It was the sort of environment where he could not discern between friend or foe. It was already an enemy’s den.

In order to protect himself, he had to kill them.

Otherwise, they would come to kill Subaru.

Subaru: “Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill…”

He did not want to kill them; he *had* to kill.

If the soul of language were to take the condition of using words correctly here, then it was likely that the word “kill” coming from Subaru’s mouth was not quite right.

If it truly reflected his feelings at heart, then the right word he should be using here was not “kill”.

——Rather, “I don’t want to die”, would be more correct.

That was why he had made up his mind that the first thing he would do was kill anyone who appeared before him.

Natsuki Subaru reached the Fourth Floor of the Tower.

And there, he laid his eyes on *that*.

Subaru: “Haa.”

He let out a short gasp.

His knife fell on the hard floor with a shrill clatter. His body was trembling. His fingers were stiff as rocks, unmoving. Subaru shrunk back, able only to shake his head slowly.

The smell of blood brimmed in the air, and the traces of a terrible fight that chilled even him.

The stone walls and floor were broken and smashed up; and standing there in the area that housed the lingering remains of such destruction was Subaru.

He looked at that, frozen in place.

——Shaula, her head crushed, was sprawled down on the floor, with her body a complete sight for sore eyes.

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Shaula's corpse was in such a terrible state that it made him want to cover his eyes.

Her long brown hair, which had been tied up, was now was sprawled untidily across the floor. Her limbs were flumped about to her side devoid of energy, and moreover, one of her arms had been sliced off at the elbow, the other at her wrist, with the severed parts nowhere in sight.

Her lustrous pale skin bore countless lacerations, and a large amount of blood had been splattered nearby. The trail of blood continued further back down the aisleway, and ended where she had met her end, proving that the battle had been long fought and changed places many times.

It had been the wound to her head that had settled the fight and killed her, most likely—— "wound" was too light of a word to use, as that which had laid waste to her life was a lethal hole.

Maybe it could be said that someone had swung down a great hammer on her head.

He could not conceive of any other barbaric way that her head would have been smashed in, scattered about, throwing its insides just about everywhere around. A tremendously huge blow from something had smashed up her head.

Shaula's head had been smashed apart and completely destroyed.

Though it had only been for a short while, he remembered how she had unhesitatingly gotten closer to him and turned her genuine open smile at him…

Subaru: "…Buh."

Subaru sunk to his knees where he was, as he gazed at her remains aghast, in shock, in disbelief.

The urge to vomit was unbearable, and unable to stop himself, Subaru puked up the contents of his stomach. The contents of his stomach which had turned to goop, mixed in with his gastric juices, splurged out of his body with an acrid smell to them.

They even got onto Shaula's remains, further humiliating her post-mortem, after having died in such a gruesome manner.

Subaru: “Uh! Guh, guuuuh, blergh…”

Despite that, Subaru, while hunched over, continued to vomit, having no composure in himself to pay attention to how he was desecrating the dead.

He could do nothing more than let his throat open as wide as it could and spew out the burning sensation that pervaded him, as he felt the pain of his stomach tightening and the unceasing feeling of wanting to vomit.

Finally, once he finished puking his guts out, Subaru threw himself down to the floor. He lay spread-eagled, staring up at the ceiling with his hands over his face.

——It was the first time he had seen someone’s death.

Subaru: “————”

It was the first time Subaru had ever come face-to-face with a person’s corpse.

For most people, the first time they would encounter a cadaver would be when an elderly relative passed away. However, Subaru had never been to a funeral before, as his grandparents on both his mother’s and father’s side were still in good health.

He had never come across anyone’s death in any other case either.

So, seeing someone else’s death like this for the first time, came as a real shock for Subaru.

Even more so when the manner of her death had been so gruesome.

There were people who could have their lives taken away from them as cruelly as this as well, he thought.

Subaru: “Me too, huh.”

Subaru muttered this to himself, and lifted his body.

He wiped away the vomit caked around his mouth with his sleeve then shook his head as his ears were ringing hard, and, using the wall to steady himself, he slowly stood up.

Subaru had been pushed in the back, knocking him far down the stairs.

His corpse too must have turned into a lump of grizzled meat, one which surely no one could bear to take a second look at. He himself had been unable to see his own corpse, and for that, he was slightly relieved.

There would probably be no way he would keep his sanity were he to see his own death with his own eyes, or the like.

The mere realization of the fact that he had died was enough to shock him to the point where it felt like his heart was about to burst apart and shatter into tiny pieces.

Subaru: “Any, ways…”

Cutting his train of thought short, Subaru gained belief of the fact that she was dead, all the while trying his utmost to keep Shaula’s remains, who was strewn near him, out of his sight.

The fact was, some terrible strife lurked within the Tower still. And at the same time, he understood all too well that this strife was not aimed at only him, but also at some of the other members inside of the Tower.

Subaru: “————”

He felt sorry for the deceased Shaula, but he could also say this bode good news for him.

Now that he did not know who had been the one that had killed him, Subaru would not be able to rest until he struck out all the suspects inside the Tower. But, with her dying, that allowed him to strike off one of the names from his seven suspects.

Yet at the same time, the one who had murdered him was hostile with someone other than himself——or at least, he could be sure that they were a dangerous individual attempting to kill everyone in the Tower.

In other words, there was a chance that someone other than him would kill the murderer who had killed him.

Then all he ought to do was to kill everyone remaining; then he would be able to acquire some peace of mind.

If he were to kill the culprit who was trying to murder him, along with the potential candidates who might try and kill him, then, with only Subaru left behind in the Tower, he should be able to indulge himself in some peace and respite.

Subaru: “In that sense… The ones in the way are Ram and Echidna, huh. It’d be easier if that damn Julius was dead too…”

With Meili and Beatrice being children, it would be pretty easy to off them, so he did not need to think too hard about them.

Emilia and, although she was dead, Shaula as well, should have been easy to catch off-guard and kill, in the sense that they never had their guards up around him.

However, Ram, who was always contrarian around him, and Echidna with how shrewd she was, smelled like the most troublesome. Even if he did catch them off-guard and killed them, those two would be the hardest to aim at, such was his impression.

It was tough to say about Julius, but in his case, he was worth his utmost vigilance. considering he was the only other man. As cheesy as it was, it was indeed a problem that he carried a sword at his waist.

However, on the flip side, there was also a chance that he would be cornered down were he to take his sword. Subaru had done *kendo*, so it could perhaps be said that he would possess the advantage assured he snatched it away. Also——

Subaru: “Above there… that fucking bastard.”

Subaru shook his head straight away having thought about eliminating that red-haired man who was sitting on the upper floor of the Tower, under the guise of being an Examiner.

It would be impossible to eliminate him. That thing was an untouchable superhuman being who lived outside of all reason.

By Natsuki Subaru’s common sense, it would be definitely impossible to beat him.

There were people here too that just could not be killed.

The only saving grace was that it was hard to think that he would be the being who had pushed Subaru off. If it were him, he would not have tried to kill him in such a dull manner; that was the kind of pessimistic faith he had.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru picked up his fallen knife, stepped over Shaula's remains and turned towards the back.

For a moment, Subaru was at loss at whether to investigate her body for any clues, but he doubted that he would find anything that would be useful hidden inside her clothing as she was very scantily dressed. At the same time, his conscience was screaming at him on the matter of further disgracing the dead.

She was dead. The dead were no longer his enemies.

She just had no luck—— That was all there was to it.

Subaru did not even bother doing anything as admirable as clasping his hands together in prayer for her.

He left her behind there, and slowly walked further into the Tower, masking his footsteps as he made his way deeper into the Fourth Floor, following the trail of destruction.

The Tower had fallen into a deep silence, to the point which not one sound could be heard; he however found that stillness rather noisy.

A high-pitched ringing noise was tormenting his mind, and he felt as if he could hear the sound of his blood flowing through his body. But, strangely enough, his heartbeat was steady, as if his initial agitation had been a lie.

Whilst going up the Fourth Floor, the dark hatred that had boiled inside him still lay stuck to his chest like dirt that would not come off.

Even now, for the sake of his own survival, his willingness to murder everyone was unshaken.

He would stab, gouge and reap the life of the first person he would lay his eyes on. He was prepared to do that. Yet——

——Just after he turned the corner, he found Echidna's corpse with a diagonal slash across it; now he had no idea just how useful his resolve was going to be in this hellscape.

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Echidna's body bore a wound from her right shoulder to her left side, as if she had been cut down in one stroke with some sort of large blade.

Subaru: "————"

And as he came to that conclusion, the first thing that popped into his mind was the sword Julius carried.

It was a cheap-looking, likely mass-produced sword, but certainly it ought to be plenty to slash through the body of a woman as delicate as Echidna.

The question remained, that he had no idea what reason Julius would have to kill Echidna.

When he had been introduced to them, Subaru had heard that Echidna and Julius had a relationship quite like one of a master and a dedicated servant—— there were some complicated circumstances involved, but in any case, they should have been quite close.

Of course, if Julius was some sort of psycho killer who wanted everyone in the Tower dead, then perhaps those circumstances meant nothing at all.

Subaru: "Uh, guh… Ah, ugh."

Using the wall to steady himself, Subaru once again succumbed to his stomach's complaints before then lifting his head up.

Her corpse was somewhat in a better condition than Shaula's. Even so, it was a sight that required nerve to witness without looking away; yet the way she had perished gave off a completely different impression to Shaula's.

While it had seemed that Shaula's corpse had been abandoned after her death, Echidna's body left him with a sense that respect had been carried out towards the deceased.

Putting it bluntly, there was a white cloth that had been placed over her and her eyelids had been closed as well.

Subaru: "————"

Considering the differences between the ways they had been killed, there was a big discrepancy in the way the deceased had been treated afterwards.

Even just thinking which one of these was more normal in this situation made him feel like he was going to be driven crazy.

Subaru: "Echidna's gone too…"

Subaru's breath quivered, his voice went hoarse, and he could not halt his arms and legs from shaking; in that state, he made just a mental note of the facts in front of him and plunged deeper into the Tower in search of survivors to kill.

Though, perhaps, even the reason whether it was the living or the dead he searched for, or for what sake he searched for, had already become nebulous for him; yet, he walked on.

——Further inside the corridor, he found Ram, her body having been blown away from behind.

Her body was in a wretched state, with a gaping hole between the neath of her chest and her lower back. Her wound looked rather similar to that which had killed the Desert Earthworm.

She had probably ran down the corridor and been struck in the back as she attempted to make her way elsewhere. He could sense a hate-tinged curse coming from her dead face, with her lips having been bitten, leaving behind regret.

He vomited again.

——In the hall, where they had explained the situation to him and eaten breakfast in the morning, lay the dead bodies of Meili and Julius.

The state in which Julius had perished was one of the most striking ones yet. Traces of blows and cuts inflicted by incredible sharpness were plastered around his entire body. His left arm had been blown off at the elbow, and his wound had been crudely wrapped up and treated using a piece of a cloak. He could

not find a direct cause to his death. From the wounds across his body, he had probably died of blood loss.

And had the reason he had fought so desperately until that, been for the sake of the little girl who was collapsed behind him?

Subaru vomited yet again.

Meili, slumped against the wall, with her hands around her belly, was the only one who had died with a peaceful expression frozen on her face.

On her abdomen covered by her small palms was indeed a gash wet with bright-red blood. Her cause of death was also probably due to blood loss. She had been wounded, and subsequently lost her life whilst waiting for salvation in this place.

And yet, the seemingly peaceful look that adorned her face in death caused him to refuse to understand even a single bit.

Once again, Subaru vomited.

Subaru: "————"

A corpse, another corpse, another corpse, another corpse, and yet another corpse.

There were corpses around. Only corpses. Only corpses lying around.

He could not fathom what was going on.

The truth behind what was going on was unclear.

Ideally speaking, everyone other than Subaru dropping dead should have been the conditions that allowed him some repose.

However, he could not comprehend why everyone was dead, when he had not even been around.

Poor Shaula, with her head crushed and her whole body sliced up.

Echidna, who had been sliced from shoulder to side, had fallen due to a terrible blow.

Ram, whose body had been blown off from the back, died leaving behind her regret and curses.

Julius, who had been left with scars all over his body of the fierce battle that had unfurled, and had eventually lost his life.

Meili, who had just lost blood from her stomach wound, yielded peacefully to a slow death.

What must have happened for this to occur?

Would he even be able to accept this situation if someone was behind it?

Subaru: “Emilia, and Beatrice…”

He had found five dead bodies, yet there were two suspects he had yet to find.

Had one of them, or both, conspired to make this happen?

Those two who had worried about Subaru having awakened with no memories from the very beginning; had they concealed killing intent and madness behind their demeanor, and thus carried out these acts of murder?

He had found five dead bodies, white sheets covering four of them, with the exception of Shaula.

All of their bodies, bar Shaula’s, had been carefully lain to rest on the floor, and they had even closed their eyes. Respect towards the dead had been shown there; only Shaula’s body did not have that.

In the first place, when the hell could this massacre have taken place?

Subaru: “The blood…”

Had dried up, he thought.

Barely keeping his footing, Subaru looked around for Emilia and Beatrice’s presences, which he had yet not found in the Tower, with each of the circumstances of the dead bodies popping up in his mind as he contemplated.

The choking stench of their blood along with the states each of their corpses had been in came back to him vividly.

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Norvak (source)

It pierced through to the depths of his mind, causing his stomach to heave in pain; however, he was running out of stuff to hurl. He was so parched that he could not muster any spit to spit out the dregs of vomit inside his mouth and nary even a bead of cold sweat appeared.

Subaru's body was completely parched. Dry, just like their blood.

There had been a ton of it, despite blood being harder to dry than water.

It would take blood several, or even dozens of hours to dry, so he could consider that such an amount had passed already since the tragedy broke out. Subaru himself had no idea how much time he had spent wandering around beneath the desert, but enough time should have passed for that; or well, he was not extremely sure.

Confusion and chaos.

The shackles of his marred awareness screamed at him to do something about this out of control situation.

He needed to earn his repose, he needed to find it; for that, he needed to reduce the number of suspects.

From the remaining two, if any of those criminals who had brought this situation about were to die, he would be freed.

Subaru: "————"

——He entered the Green Room. The black lizard caught eye of Subaru and gave out a cry.

It was the first time since he had came back to this Tower that he had found a living creature.

Subaru: "Huh, what's with this lizard."

Seeing that the lizard had survived, Subaru let out a parched smile.

He had hoped that, if he was going to meet someone, if possible, it would be a corpse; however, what damned use was it that the survivor he had met here after all this, was the lizard.

He gave a click of his tongue and turned around so to leave the room. He did not have anything to do in rooms where only lizards remained. However——

Subaru: “Quit following me!”

???: “————”

The black lizard, having shrunk down its massive body, had tried to follow in Subaru’s wake when he had left the room.

It was surprisingly large when it stood up, as big as a horse. It plodded along, moving its sharp, clawed feet, following Subaru.

Unable to bear the tension, Subaru waved his arms and threatened it with spittle flying from his mouth.

Subaru: “It’s not like I’ve got the time to play with you right now! I need to kill all the damn survivors in this Tower! If you get in my way…”

Whilst gripping the large knife in his hand, Subaru stared straight at the lizard.

The sharp-featured lizard looked at it in his hand, but quickly turned its gaze back towards him.

Subaru: “Uh…”

Subaru’s voice shook at the way they were ignoring his knife and instead were staring at him.

It was as if it was undaunted by Subaru’s murderous hostilities. And that roused the animosity that had been uncomfortably smoldering inside his chest——

Subaru: “——Don’t you fucking screw about with me!!”

Subaru swung his knife up and plunged it into the lizard as he cried out.

The tip of the knife plunged into its jet-black scales. Though at first, the knife encountered a bit of resistance, he was able to easily push through it, thrusting it deep into the lizard’s body.

The lizard stood there, unmoving, with the knife stuck through the left side of its body. The blade dug into its flesh all the way to its hilt, with fresh blood spilling out from its clearly deep wound.

Subaru: “How about…”

Subaru tried to continue by saying “this”; however he involuntarily let out a thin, ragged sigh.

For the first time, he had taken the action to try kill a living being. And although he felt excited by that fact, and the fact that his heart beating wildly had caused that, there had been a different reason as to why he had not been able to finish what he wanted to say.

Lizard: “————”

Subaru: “Ah, uh…”

Even though the lizard had been stabbed by his knife, it remained unmoving, merely staring at Subaru.

It had not reacted at all, having been stabbed deeply by his blade. Neither in pain, nor surprise. The lizard’s sharp eyes merely stared at Natsuki Subaru’s handiwork.

Those lizard eyes, which he could not read the emotions therein, were blaming Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “Shit… Shitshitshitshitshit! Whatthehellwhatthehellwhatthehell!”

Scratching his head, Subaru could not stand it any longer and lost his shit.

Whilst shouting, Subaru took a step back, forgetting even to retrieve his knife he had stuck the lizard’s body with.

——No, the courage to touch that knife was not in him. The lizard’s eyes were terrifying.

Subaru: “You, those guys except you… and those corpses! As well as those guys still living! Those guys who I don’t even know if they are alive or dead! What on earth are you all cooking up, what are you trying to do!?”

Despite knowing his words were pointless, Subaru still blurted them to the lizard standing before him.

As he had wandered throughout the Tower, as he had wandered through the pitch-black darkness of the underground, as he had anguished at the fact that he had been thrown into this world of which he could not make heads or tails out of it, his gloomy emotions had built up.

Subaru: “I’m gonna kill every single one of these guys who tries to kill me! I’m gonna deny every single one who tries to depend on me! Don’t get me wrong! Don’t push your luck! It ain’t a damn joke… acting like you’re so close to me as you please!”

Lizard: “————”

Subaru: “As if I give a damn about any of you! As if I give a damn about what every single one of you are thinking! Every one of you is pushing their own damned agenda on me…! If you all have your hands full with your own selves! Then I’ve got my own hands full with myself as well!”

Shouting and screaming, Subaru began to shed tears without him even realizing, falling down to his knees on the spot.

In front of him, the lizard wordlessly looked at him as his body shook and let out ragged gasps. Subaru had crouched down and pressed his head to the floor, unable to see them.

Subaru: “Like just leave me alone… Leave me be by myself…”

Subaru’s choked sobs vacantly echoed through the silent corridor.

How long had he spent like this? Several seconds? Dozens of seconds? Several minutes? He could not find it in himself to move. But it was with his face pressed to the floor that he suddenly noticed.

Faint, really faint tremors, drawing near to him through the floor——

Subaru: “Ah.”

Lizard: “————MM!”

Subaru lifted his face a moment later, seeing the lizard’s gaping maw in front of him.

Lined with sharped fangs, that maw inched closer towards him. He looked at it, as if it was not him in this situation, wondering whether they were going to chew his head up——

Subaru: “Uh——!?”

The lizard picked up Subaru by his left shoulder using its mouth, and without wasting a moment, started to run.

His body had been forcibly pulled up from the ground and lifted. The lizard's sharp fangs had bitten into his shoulder, causing a shriek of pain to escape his mouth.

Subaru: "Gii, ah! Hyaaaaaah!"

It was going to kill him. He was probably going to be killed. Those were its intentions.

However, now that it had practically sunk its fangs into his shoulder, the fear he had towards the pain it brought was readily painted over by a feeling of cheap resignation. He was going to have his shoulder eaten, then his body, chewed up like that, and left to die.

To die being eaten by a living creature was one of the worst deaths Subaru could possibly imagine.

It was just after Subaru's body began to tremble in fear at that presentiment, that——

???: "————"

The hallway that Subaru had just been in, was blown away from beneath by an astonishing amount of black haze.

He heard a heavy impact which caused dust and debris to scatter around, the fog was overrunning the hallway, engulfing the ceiling, the walls, the floor, reaching out towards Subaru and the lizard as if hunting for prey.

——Made up of black shadows, it even looked like it had arms.

Subaru: "Shadowy arms…"

In his mind, he briefly recalled the shape of the woman who had tormented him by the stairs.

A woman drenched in shadows, her face was hidden by a black veil, had thoroughly played with his heart, engraving fear in him. The shadows that were engulfing the room were akin to the ones that the woman wore.

It was laying waste to the Tower's passageway as it pleased—— chasing after the fleeing lizard and Subaru.

Subaru: "You…!"

The lizard did not answer, but with Subaru held in its mouth, it ran through the passageway at full gallop.

Subaru, who was looking in the opposite direction to which they were headed, could not see where they were desperately trying to flee to. Instead, he could only look straight at the menace of the looming shadow, making the blood inside his body freeze.

So, it was either be devoured by that shadow, or meet a fate that would be more terrible than death.

Intuitively making his mind up, Subaru pushed himself further into the fangs of the lizard digging into his shoulder. His throat quivered in pain, but if he were to be shaken off, he would be done for.

At this point, his hatred for the lizard, was no more than a pointless obsession.

Lizard: "————MM!"

They heard the sound of the passageway exploding as the shadow blocked their way.

Taking a snap decision a split second later, the lizard turned back down the aisle, diving into a side-corridor just before they could be swallowed up by the shadow. It galloped at full speed, trying to shake off the shadow that was surging towards them with the force of a muddy stream.

However, as they kept running away from the shadow, the area that appeared in front of them was——

Subaru: "——Tch! The spiral staircase… Hk!"

The huge spiral staircase which connected the Fourth and Fifth Floors of the Tower. Subaru was lost for words as they emerged there, in that area.

Naturally, he could see the Fifth Floor far off down below from the height they were at—— he did feel some of the fear of witnessing the scene where he had fallen to his death before, but not only that.

Right below him, the staircase was being engulfed by the shadows of black, and was beginning to sink down.

Meaning that the lower half of the Tower was in the process of being enveloped by these colossal amounts of shadows, sinking it.

Subaru: “There’s no escaping down there… But there’s no escaping behind us as well…”

The bottom of the Tower was already under the shadow’s control. The dark, muddy stream was looming towards them from the insides of the passageway that they had fled from.

They were absolutely, completely cornered.

All that was left, was the absurd choice of whether he would be devoured by the shadows, or killed in some other manner.

Subaru: “————”

For a second, the idea of suicide flitted across his mind.

Wouldn’t it be much better to choose how he died, rather than be swallowed by those shadows? Perhaps for Subaru, there was still possibilities remaining even if he were to die.

Subaru: “Ah, ugh.”

As soon as he thought about taking his own life, Subaru’s body started to tremble.

What if by some chance, choosing to kill himself would it end it here? What would he do then? He did sort of believe now that he was redoing things, but did he really have a guarantee that this would keep holding true?

Or, how could he say that this was not a precognitive dream just like he had thought at first. All the way up to the last time, he had had some painful precognitive dreams. So, if this was his last one, then things would end for him here.

Why did he even have to die in the first place?

He had not done anything wrong. Why was he paying with his life here? Why him?

Subaru: “No… I DON’T WANT TO DIE!”

Subaru yelled that out without any shame.

There was no one in the Tower who could hear him. Only the dead and the missing were here.

So, the only one who could hear him was this jet-black lizard, who was not a human being.

Lizard: “————M!”

Whilst holding Subaru by its fangs, the lizard gave a choked, almighty roar.

Immediately afterwards, the lizard broke into a fierce sprint and leapt towards the void of the spiral staircase, so to give the muddy stream of tendrils looming behind them the slip.

Subaru: “————”

Naturally, no matter how much momentum the leap carried, they would eventually lose it, with gravity catching them into a free-fall, to be swallowed by the shadows below.

However, the lizard had come up with an ingenious idea to overcome this desperate situation.

Lizard: “————M!”

The lizard dug two of its pointed feet into the Tower’s wall. Of course, even if they were clinging to the wall, sooner or later they would fall—— if the wall was vertical, that is.

The lizard ran frantically across the wall, letting out a roar.

The colossal Tower was starting to tilt due to the shadows engulfing it from its base. The lizard scaled its way across the wall, which was lurching to its side, practically perpendicular.

Subaru: “N-no way…”

What was going on? Everything was swaying, Subaru could not make sense of what the complete picture here was.

However, it was clear that this black lizard was spending its remaining strength trying to survive. He could clearly tell that they were giving it their all for that.

Subaru: “You——”

Suddenly, the dark stream of tendrils completely enveloped the place where the lizard had just been. It searched for signs of the prey it had failed to swallow, and realized that they were running up the wall. It rushed towards them.

The lizard dodged aside a split second later, barely managing to avoid its attack. A violent shockwave and a fierce howling wind accompanied the attack, leaving behind a large hole in the side of the Tower.

Lizard: “————M!”

Without hesitating, the lizard slipped into the hole that had opened in the wall.

Subaru was violently jolted left and right, his sense of balance being lost by his semicircular canals, no longer able to perceive the world properly. Though, even among all this, he knew that the lizard’s drastic maneuvers were to make sure that Subaru was not struck by any of the shadow’s attacks. He also knew that they were not showing any consideration to the fact that its own body was being whittled away by the shadow.

They came out of the large hole. A sandy breeze immediately greeted him after, with darkness filling his field of view.

He could feel the outside air against him. Had they have jumped out of the Tower? Once again, the lizard ran up the tilting Tower wall, frantically, frantically trying to escape from the shadow——

Subaru: “——Uwa!?”

The lizard’s thin neck was stooped over, and the next moment, a strong breeze buffeted them.

The lizard let go of Subaru, pulling its fangs from his shoulder. Subaru’s eyes flashed in pain as he felt the sensation of the fangs being removed from his flesh. However, he ignored his pain, as well as the strong wind which was blowing against him. His body had been struck by something hard.

After being bumped around, tumbled about and thrown down, letting out a winded breath, Subaru opened his eyes.

He caught a glimpse of the night sky flickering in front of him.

Subaru: “Ah, eh…?”

Subaru lifted himself up from the floor in a panic, the view he was seeing far beyond what his imagination could comprehend.

He looked around at his surroundings. He was in an area made from the same stuff as the Tower, but despite that, he was definitely outside—— He could see that this space was attached to the outer wall of the Tower, resembling something like a balcony.

They had gone through the hole, rushed up the wall, and thrown him here——

Subaru: “The lizard…!”

Shuddering, Subaru rushed over to where he had tumbled down and looked beneath him.

There, he witnessed the last moments of the lizard, who had thrown him here.

——The falling lizard was swallowed up by the black shadows, which were even darker than its scales, and vanished from sight.

He had stabbed it with his knife due to his crazed anger, yet it had not even cared about its pain and fear. They had brought Subaru up to this balcony, only to then be swallowed by the shadow.

Swallowed by those shadows, where a fate worse than death awaited.

Subaru: “What, what the hell.”

What the hell. What the hell. What the hell.

Subaru had no idea of what was going on anymore.

Subaru: “————”

He watched the bottom of the Tower gradually get engulfed by the shadows, up on the balcony. Suddenly, a white bird perched itself at the edge of the balcony beside him.

The white bird looked at Subaru with unfeeling eyes—— at the presence of the large bird, Subaru gasped out a “ha”.

The suspects who had died, the suspects who were nowhere to be seen, the lizard that had helped him at the cost of their life, and now, a white bird had suddenly appeared in this place—— little-by-little, the Tower was being swallowed by the shadow, disappearing in front of his eyes.

Subaru: “————”

Feeling that the end was approaching, Subaru sat down in exhaustion.

He now understood that the lizard had been ever so desperately trying to save him. Even so, their expectations had been in vain—— they had just bought him a little more time before death dawned on him.

Subaru: “————”

Still slumped down, Subaru suddenly lifted his head up.

There was someone behind him. It was not the bird, nor the lizard, nor the shadow.

There was a sign of someone living, who was standing there.

Subaru: “…The hell are you?”

Subaru asked this in a very faint tone of voice, having nary even the strength to look back behind.

The one who stood behind him laughed in response. Then, in a voice he had never heard before.

???: “——Next, try guessing, hero.”

For a second, Subaru heard a whooshing noise. Then his field of vision jumped up, and began revolving rapidly in front of him.

His body felt awfully light. He was soaring up into the sky like a bird. And then he realized what had happened.

The someone from behind had decapitated him——

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???: "——Subaru! Hey, Subaru, are you okay?"

The connection between his head, that should have been lopped off, and the change in his consciousnesses happened in an instant.

Subaru woke up on a soft ivy bed, greeted by the chiming voice of a silver bell, along with its owner, having not found her, no matter how hard he had searched.

Subaru: "Emi, lia…"

Emilia: "Oh, Subaru, thank goodness. You woke up. I was reaaally worried about you."

There was a girl—— Emilia was in front of him, a relieved expression resting on her face as Subaru opened his eyes slightly. She had her hand to her chest seeing him wake up, with a smile grooved in her lips.

Subaru: "————"

He looked at Emilia; her beautiful, slender neck was frightfully dazzling.

Feeling rather parched, Subaru wordlessly stretched out his hands over, around Emilia's slender neck. It easily fit between Subaru's hands.

Emilia: "Subaru, what's the matter?"

Emilia was staring blankly, her eyes widened in surprise, with her neck having been grabbed by Subaru.

She was surprised by Subaru's reaction, but she did not make any movements to try and get him off her. If he felt like it, he could have definitely ended up breaking her neck with ease, were he to just put some muscle into it.

Even though her life was held within Subaru's grasp, Emilia's reaction was awfully slow, moreover——

???: "Emilia, apparently Subaru is still half-asleep, I suppose. He's acting all easy regardless of worrying us, in fact."

Subaru: "——Hk."

Subaru let go of Emilia's neck immediately as a voice called out to him from right beside him.

He glanced over, his eyes meeting Beatrice's as she folded her short arms together by his bedside, her nostrils flaring in absolute shock. Emilia gave her a strained smile, and said, "Yeah",

Emilia: "Though, it's better for you to be half-asleep than it being anything else more serious… When I found you collapsed on the ground, Beatrice was nearly in tears."

Beatrice: "You don't have to mention the part that dispenses mentioning, I suppose!"

Beatrice's face grew red, angered by Emilia's unmalicious comment.

The two of them, locked in that exchange, had absolutely no idea what kind of urge had caught hold of Subaru just a moment ago. Before that, they had shown no recognition of the situation being dangerous.

This was also evident in their attitude towards Subaru——

Subaru: "——Meaning, this is…"

Immediately after Subaru, after "Natsuki Subaru" had lost his memories—— that was to say, the moment on which Natsuki Subaru had realized that he had been summoned to another world, he had come back to that very place.

And, at the same time——

???: "————M!"

Subaru: "——! It's you… Hk."

Subaru hastily turned around at the sound of its whinny and breath, its figure coming into view.

Sitting docilely in one corner of the Green Room, was a large black creature—— the lizard, who had done so much for him on the verge of being swallowed by the shadow, was sitting there, coolly.

Beatrice: "…I'm a little unsatisfied, in fact. Finding you should have been Betty and Emilia's exploit, I suppose."

Emilia: "Hehe, no need to sulk about it. It's great, isn't it? Subaru and Patrasche get on reaaally well."

Behind him, Subaru could hear Beatrice and Emilia talking to one another.

However, Subaru did not care to join in; he was too busy tightly embracing the large body of the lizard in front of him, immensely thankful that it was here.

——He was eternally grateful that, back then, they had been the only one who had not tried to hurt Subaru.

Arc 6 Chapter 43 - Tower of the Living

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 3 “Hollow Shell”, Part 7, and Volume 23, Chapter 4 “The Tower of the Living”, Parts 1-3 (near the end)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——Think.

Think, think, think, think, think, think, he must think.

Subaru: “————”

Natsuki Subaru kept thinking as he wrapped his arms around its whole body, which was lined by hard, rough scales.

The things that had happened to his own body, the ridiculous events inside the Tower, the people who were attempting to kill him, the people who were attempting to kill ones other than himself, distinguishing between friends and foe, and——

???: “Subaru, is that enough, in fact? Have you calmed down, I suppose?”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru turned his head slowly towards the voice he had heard from behind him, which had interrupted his thoughts. Beatrice, the one who had called out to him, was sitting upon the ivy bed.

The girl, who seemed to be making a pouty face, was dangling her feet. Her hand was connected with Emilia’s, who sat beside her. She was glaring at Subaru—— Seeing that look, Subaru’s face stiffened a little.

Emilia: “Heeey, Beatrice. Don’t speak like that. I guess Subaru felt surprised when he woke up. I think it’s inevitable that he’d go hug Patrasche.”

However, Emilia smiled as she denied Subaru’s misguided thoughts. Hearing her point this out, Beatrice proceeded to suddenly turn away from Subaru and Emilia.

Beatrice: “It doesn’t mean I am angry, in fact. It’s not just to do with your sudden awakening, I suppose. Betty and Emilia were also worried for Subaru, the ground dragon isn’t the only one that worries about you, in fact.”

Emilia: “Hehe, yeah, you were really worried about him.”

Stroking Beatrice’s head with her still facing away from them, Emilia looked at Subaru and raised her eyebrows. Subaru held his breath as he looked into Emilia’s amethyst eyes.

His chest gave a sharp pang to the deep, deep affection in her look ——And at the same time, a strange sense of irritation grew in him.

He was reminded. They were hoping in “Natsuki Subaru”, the one that was here.

He would feel uneasy were he not able to shoulder that burden. But, however——

Subaru: “——Errr, I am sorry to worry you all. I am sorry, I heavily apologize. It is not like me to hug a girl that is half-asleep and this even, is a thing to hide my embarrassment.”

Relaxing his stiffened face, Subaru replied, whilst easing his face into a smile. To that answer, Beatrice and Emilia exchanged looks, and,

Emilia: “But, Patrasche is a girl as well, you know?”

Subaru: “Ehhh!? Hey, wait, Patrasche is quite the special entry, or rather, the sort of target which we are bonded by different sorts of bonds, or rather, the top seed in an unconditional second round entry.”

Beatrice: “Hmph, that is unpardonable, I suppose. I don’t get why you’re only giving special treatment to that ground dragon, in fact. I would like an explanation, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Hey, don’t try to stand in the same ring as her! That ground dragon… you know.”

Subaru returned his answer whilst looking carefully at Beatrice and Emilia's reaction, as Beatrice's face was growing ever more in displeasure. Receiving his answer, it seemed that the two of them did not feel like anything was out of place.

Feeling relieved about that, Subaru turned his head to look towards the lizard—— no, towards Patrasche, whose nape he had been stroking.

Subaru: "Truly, only you are special, Patrasche."

Patrasche: "————"

The black ground dragon closed its eyes while letting out a small neigh, as Subaru placed his forehead against her head.

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Emilia: "So, Subaru, are you really feeling okay?"

Subaru: "Ah, yes, yes, I am okay, I am okay, absolutely *mondai nai*[149]. I'm sorry for worrying you all. I think perhaps the exhaustion got to me, and as things are rather the case with that, I must've accidentally fallen asleep."

Emilia: "Yeah… but you'll tell us if you are tired, right? Because, you can take it easy."

Emilia brought this reminder to Subaru who had answered in tune whilst rotating his arms. Subaru answered back to those words with a lackadaisical "Okay, Captain!", as he immersed himself in full thought.

Subaru led Beatrice and Emilia now, and kept walking through the Fourth Floor of the Tower.

They were going to the hall of the Fourth Floor, their purpose being to dine—— in brief, the three of them were walking with their bodies not holding any urgent issues.

[149] Engrish flip. Means "no problem" (問題ない), originally "ノープロ" (no prob). It's the same as used by Shaula in Arc 6 Chapter 31.

This time, Subaru was determined to take a different approach from last time. That was—— he would not confide to Emilia and the others about his amnesia.

Subaru: "————"

In other words, the situation would require Subaru to act as if he were impersonating another.

Wetting his parched lips with his tongue as his strain exacerbated, Subaru had kept observing how things were around Emilia and the others.

Subaru had still not figured out what kind of character "Natsuki Subaru" was for the others. It should be impossible to do something like tracing a stranger in such circumstances, but by all rights, it should be a different story to "impersonate himself" in conditions that would otherwise not be established.

——No matter where he went, "Natsuki Subaru" would simply be just Natsuki Subaru.

Even if he had spent a year in this parallel world, Subaru knew that the fundamentals of human nature would remain unchanged in himself. Then, if he just paid heed to the relationship afterwards, then he should be able to trace the same sort of character to a good enough extent.

And then, whilst tracing "Natsuki Subaru", he would see what would happen now.

What had happened in this Tower? Who would kill him? And who had been killed by who.

For now, Subaru would verify one possibility for the trigger that had driven him to his own Death by hiding his amnesia. In other words, would his opponent kill him because of his amnesia, or did it have nothing to do with that?

Be that as it may, in all honesty, he did not have much expectations. Subaru's lost memories—— it was hard to imagine the situation without some troubles cropping up.

However, of course there are exceptions.

Subaru: "The case in which the criminal was someone who'd be troubled if my memories were to come back."

Subaru remembered seeing it in a movie before.

Eyewitnesses who had witnessed the murder scene lost their memory due to some sort of shock. The criminal, observing the scene, would be in trouble if their memories were to return. That was why, in the movie, the criminal tried to kill the witnesses as well.

It could definitely be thought that a similar situation was occurring to Subaru currently. Foremost, the circumstances in which Subaru had lost his memories were unclear——

Subaru: “Emilia, did you find me collapsed in the Library of the Third Floor?”

Emilia: “Yeah, that’s right. You were on the floor of the Library… Beatrice and I carried you to the Green Room in a great hurry.”

Beatrice: “Well, since it was Emilia that carried you, Betty was just there to help out behind her, in fact.”

Subaru gazed at Emilia’s slender arms as he received Beatrice’s supplementary explanation, laced with a sigh.

If he were to settle down and think properly about it, it was a mystery to Subaru how these two people had carried him all the way back from the Library to the Green Room. Beatrice did not let off a single fragment of indication that she was suited to do any heavy lifting, and from what he had been told at face value, he was also wondering how this Emilia that believed in a fake had carried Subaru so easily.

Emilia: “——? What’s wrong?”

Subaru: “Errrrr, nothing. Well, in any case, you were a great help. I’ve said it many times, but sorry to have troubled you.”

Emilia: “Not sorry, a «thank you» would be nicer.”

Bowing his head in apology, Emilia placed her palm on Subaru’s forehead as he tried to lower it. Subaru’s eyes widened at the touch of Emilia’s smooth fingers, hastily muttering out an “I guess you’re right”.

As Subaru had thought so far, the feeling of distance between him and Emilia was a little too strong; therefore, he did not hesitate and let her touch him.

Come to think of it, when Subaru had woken up, he had also placed his hands around her neck. Nevertheless, she was looking at Subaru with a peaceful expression.

Subaru: “No matter what kind of livelihood, I will always feel a great sense of distance with this girl…”

Or perhaps, Emilia, contrary to her awfully well-prepared appearance, was just all too used to strangeness? Surely, she was gentle to everyone as well, and probably she did not feel any barriers between anyone as a result of having been brought up being loved.

She was likely a girl who had been sheltered as a child, unaffected by any significant hardship—— with this impression, Subaru was satisfied with this sense of distance.

If someone was not burdened with even one regret, then they could believe in only the virtue of others, and could keep your eyes all the time prim and beautiful—— Or, was even that all just an act?

Subaru: “————”

Whilst looking at Emilia and Beatrice side-by-side, Subaru was deeply immersed within his thoughts.

Simply, when he deconstructed it down to the bare bones, when it came to Subaru’s last moments and tragedy in the Tower within the last loop, the suspects most worth keeping an eye on were Emilia and Beatrice.

Subaru had seen the corpses of Shaula, Echidna, Ram, Julius and Meili.

He had been saved by Patrasche and brought out of the lurching Tower; however, he’d had his head lopped off by someone standing behind him, and lost his life—— he had not seen the deaths of the two.

Of course, even if the two of them had conspired together, then he did not know if the possibility of the killing of the five people still remained. Subaru’s diagnosis was that it was difficult.

But, if for argument’s sake, another person existed—— if the number had increased to three, then the story would probably change.

???: “——Next, try guessing, hero.”

Subaru had no memory of the unknown voice which had spoken those words at the end.

In the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the swirl of confusion, in the midst of despairing of wanting the end to come already, he had heard this voice.

A third person cooperating with Emilia and Beatrice—— could that be the identity of an unseen third person that had carried Subaru from the Library to the Green Room? That's why these two were spouting out such codswallop——

Emilia: "Uh, Subaru, you are going too far."

Subaru: "Uh, oh?"

Apparently, Subaru had walked past the room while immersed in his own thoughts. Emilia had stopped in front of the room and had placed her arm on Subaru's shoulder as to prevent him from walking too far.

In an instant, Subaru felt peculiarly uncomfortable, and looked at Emilia's hand which had grabbed his shoulder. And then, he took her hand and shook it.

Beatrice: "Subaru? What the heck are you doing, I suppose?"

Subaru: "Ah, just a little experiment… Emilia, won't you do a contest of strength with me?"

Emilia: "Ehh, but I think we'd better have it stop from being dangerous…"

There had been no sense of resistance when he had shaken her hand itself, and Emilia had shown a sense of denial to the contest of strength. Seeing this behavior, Subaru became more convinced and strongly said, "I ask this of you".

If Emilia's slender arm indeed did not have the strength to carry Subaru, then his deduction from before would have been given a fairly strong guarantee. So now, Emilia should not think that she was being suspected.

He would need to make best use of this advantage, a chance like this only existed right now.

Subaru: "I ask this of you, because it's of utmost necessity."

Emilia: "…Since Subaru sounds quite serious, it must be quite the important thing, right?"

Receiving Subaru's supplication, the worried Emilia pursed her lips, and gave a nod with a determined look.

Seeing that, Subaru clenched his fist with all his heart, stating "Ready". If after, he proved her weakness, then Subaru's deduction would progress far further.

Beatrice: "Well, do something different like an arm-pull match instead so that it doesn't become dangerous, in fact. is that okay, I suppose?"

Subaru: "Ah, *yoshi*[150]!"

Emilia: "Okay, got it!"

In accordance to Beatrice's instructions, Subaru and Emilia shook hands, and made some space between them. They took each other's right arm, and then the two of them stared into each other's eyes. And then——

Beatrice: "*Junbibantan, hajimeru*[151], in fact!"

On Beatrice's signal, Subaru pulled Emilia's arm with all his might.

Subaru: "Uohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

His grip strength could crush apples, his grip strength could keep swinging a *kendo* sword even with no target, his strength could have him doing push-ups without stopping. The strength of a man against that of a woman's; he poured all of this into this battle.

——Yet, Emilia's arm did not move an inch.

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[150] Engrish flip. Means "alright" (よし), originally "OK".

[151] Engrish flip. Means "everything ready(?), start" (準備万端, 始めろ), originally "レディ、ゴー" (ready, go). As stated by Witch Cult Translations' translator, this Engrish line is most likely something that was picked up from Subaru.

Subaru's deduction, in which he doubted Beatrice and Emilia, was set back to square one.

However, that did not mean that Subaru's suspicions about the two girls had been cleared away, as he had only confirmed that Emilia and the others had carried him without the help of a third party. No. Subaru had yet to see the two girls' corpses.

The Tower's massacre—— that situation's criminal being different was something that was still not decided.

Subaru: "To sum it up, in truth, was the guy who came out at the end the criminal?"

They had certainly killed Subaru.

But was that guy a criminal insofar to have carried out the mass murder of everyone by those hands? As well as the shadows which had engulfed the Tower? All the ones killed were each killed in different ways. What became of that explanation?

The ways they had died in was easy to understand merely from glimpsing. Echidna had suffered damage from a single stroke from something sharp. Julius'd had several wounds piled up on him. And hadn't Meili died from blood-loss?

There was no doubt that everyone had died in different manners, fighting someone.

???: "So, what exactly was that prank about?"

And, a voice called out as if amazed to Subaru, who was deep in thought.

That voice was Ram's, who was finishing preparing breakfast. As she set up the table with water and preserved food, she demanded an explanation on the experiment Subaru had carried out—— the contest of strength with Emilia.

The contest of strength for determining proof of Subaru's deduction had its curtain closed by the shape of his defeat to Emilia. It was Ram joining up with them in front of the hall, which had given an impetus for its end. Upon seeing Subaru's struggles, red in face, she had put an end to things with a curt "Are you stupid?".

Emilia: “I was asked by Subaru, I don’t quite understand why but I am sure it had some reaaallly important meaning to it. Isn’t that right, Subaru?”

Ram: “Is that so? To Ram, all that could be seen was the wish to hold Emilia-sama’s hand.”

Subaru: “You’re overthinking it! If you want, next time do you want to do a contest of strength with me!?”

Ram: “Disgusting.”

Subaru: “Why!?”

Ram spoke her awfully cruel impression of him to Emilia, who had tried to stick up for him. If he tried to dispel it, in an instant his position would get considerably worse. An undoubtedly vicious cycle.

Ram: “Haa!”

Giving a scornful laugh, Ram diverted her attention back to setting the table. Seeing her retreating figure, Subaru was secretly relieved that it seemed as if his current behavior did not give off anything that would feel out of place.

It seemed as if he had yet to take an attitude which separated him from the “Natsuki Subaru” known by the girls. This made him feel relieved, and also amazed.

Doing this, he must not tip his awareness towards a different bearing, not even by a little——

Subaru: “Urf.”

In an instant, Subaru bore the vomiting sensation that suddenly welled up in him and put his hand to his mouth.

Its cause was Ram, diligently working with her back turned towards them—— the girl’s retreating figure caused him to keep blinking with the manner of death scorching his eyelids.

Ram had received a blow from behind, in which part of her stomach had been blown apart, killing her.

Her death mask was coated with regret and anger, distorting and cursing her pitiful facial expression. A lamentation was etched into her soul which would attempt to tear any who witnessed it from limb to limb.

The owner of that corpse moved right before his eyes, and certainly was alive.

In all honesty, from the moment he had first came across her at the hall, he had been desperate to accept a contradiction between reality and that uncomfortable feeling.

He felt more or less relieved that he could use the lapse of dizziness he had experienced as an excuse, thanks to his exertions in the contest of strength with Emilia just before.

But, he had overlooked Ram's facial expression.

Ram: "————"

Grinding his teeth together, Subaru directed his awareness into recuperating his strong self-control. From then on, all the people related to the Tower one-by-one filed into the hall. He must not overlook each of their expressions—— Because that in itself would be the key to breaking the situation.

???: "Wooooah, what a nice smeeell~! A meal fit for a king in this refreshing morning! Iiii sure know I'm living for this~!"

The first one of them showed up in the hall whilst saying out this stuff noisily.

A beautiful woman whose long black braided hair was swinging about, unabashedly exposing most of her plump breasts—— Shaula showed up in the hall with her head definitely still attached to her body.

She was looking at the meal which had been prepared by Ram, but, then she noticed Subaru within the room, and,

Shaula: "Master! Good morning! Did you sleep well yesterday~?"

All of a sudden, her facial expression lit up, and she rushed over towards his location with the vigor of say, a puppy. And then, grabbing Subaru's arm, she tightly embraced his chest.

Subaru: "Uh…"

Shaula: “By the way, Iiii~ slept incredibly well! After such a long time, I had dreams and such from the former days~. Meeee~ and Master, and Mother, and then and theeen.”

Subaru: “Ahh, gotcha, wait. I will give a good listen to the story about your dream sometime… But, did you happen to see me this morning?”

Shaula: “Ehhhh, again with the awfully weightless questions? How typical of Master!”

Somehow disentangling himself from her arms which had embraced him, Subaru inquired this as he escaped from Shaula. In response to that, Shaula gave a cheerful laugh.

Shaula: “Honestly, what Master sees is no big deal! Just like the olden days, to me you’re always the sexiest guy! It’s a marriage proposal I’ve been waiting for four-hundred years!”

Subaru: “Talk about patience… Jokes aside, if there’s nothing else, then sure.”

Shaula: “——? Is that so? If so, I dooon’t~ mind as well~.”

Without a desired response, Subaru withdrew his doubts regarding Shaula whilst sensing some relief mingled with some traces of discouragement.

And, as he did, the next suspect, Meili showed up in the room.

???: “Uwaaaaaaaaah… Good morning. I’m feeling sleepy this morning tooo~.”

The girl who came through the entrance gave a sweet yawn, covering her mouth with her hand. Even so, she had taken great care to keep up her personal appearance, and he certainly admired the little girl’s sense of beauty.

Greatly different to Subaru who was just content in ruffling his hair up, and washing his face. In any case——

Subaru: “Good morning, Meili! You overslept this morning, huh?”

Meili: “When slowing down and thinking about it, I feel like I have no reason to get up at the same time as onee-san and the others. This Tower doesn’t really have anything to do with me.”

Beatrice: “A girl whose proposing such ill-natured things, in fact. In general, unless Betty and the others complete the Examinations so to leave the Tower, then you can’t leave this Tower either, I suppose.”

Meili: “Well, that is true… but…”

Having a bone to pick with her yawning excuses, Meili pursed her lips at Beatrice’s opinion. As she said that, she shifted her attention to Shaula and Subaru who were near the wall. She gave a wave, accompanied by a smile.

Seeing that, Subaru raised his eyebrow, and then returned the wave.

Subaru: “Am I overthinking it as usual, in having doubting even a dead child…?”

Shaula: “Master, when troubled, you return back to the basis. Starting with how you jab.”

Subaru: “…What is that teaching?”

Shaula: “It’s Master’s teachings.”

Subaru: “It’s no wonder I thought it was useless.”

Listening to this monologue, Subaru dodged Shaula’s frivolities as he shuddered in his heart

In any case, he couldn’t get a response he desired even from Meili. Then, the only things which remained were just two more people who could test whether this plan was at all fruitful——

???: “——Good morning.”

With that, the last two people missing entered the room together.

Echidna and Julius. Echidna, wrapped in a white fox scarf, walked into the hall with Julius beside her. They each in turn greet Emilia, Ram and the others, and exchange words of good morning. Meanwhile.

Julius: “————”

Julius, who had been walking behind Echidna, saw Subaru standing near the back of the room, and his face stiffened. He suddenly averted his eyes and drove Subaru out of his awareness.

Subaru: "——You?"

Julius's reaction was quite close to the one Subaru was seeking.

And, as no one other person had shown such a reaction, he had no choice but to say that it had been him the one to display the most blunt reaction.

Subaru: "…Shaula, I have a small favor to ask you."

Subaru faintly muttered this. The remains of hatred, as if boiled with the flames of anger that would not extinguish, were present.

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——The breakfast at the hall started and ended with the meeting regarding the explanation that Echidna was Anastasia.

As he made his face into something as if he was hearing it for the first time, he looked to the surprised reactions of Emilia and the others. Subaru was impressed with the way the world had proceeded with him not having mentioned his amnesia.

Thus far, Subaru had hardly comprehended his own special characteristic in Return by Death, due to a combination of surreal feelings and a misinterpretation of facts. However, just the same as the time leaps often found in fiction, the problems which did not involve Subaru would proceed the same as usual. He understood that changes in the problems which did, were born.

In other words, up until the last time, he had been involved in the core of their discussions due to his amnesia. The reality in which the individual called Echidna lodging in the body of the young girl called Anastasia had, by no means, been delved deeply into during their talks.

Even this time around, there would be no such thing as finding the problem's solution or something that would reveal new facts. Changes were considered to occur only via Subaru's actions.

If he wanted to dramatically advance the situation, Subaru would need to proactively do stuff. Therefore——

Subaru: “——Julius, I’d like to have a couple of words with you.”

Breakfast ended, and as they all tried to file out of the hall, Subaru called out to Julius so that he would stop. Julius stopped in his tracks at that call, turning his head to look at Subaru.

Subaru craned his neck up to look at him when facing each other, as Julius was quite tall. However, if he were to lose to that intimidating presence, Subaru would stick his chest out all the more, as he and Julius glared at each other.

Perceiving his disposition, Julius spilled a weary sigh from his thin lips, and said,

Julius: “What is it? Shouldn’t you rest until noon, as Emilia-sama suggested?”

Julius’s words were something he had gotten from Emilia’s proposal back at breakfast.

Apparently, it seemed that Emilia had been worried about unseen fatigue wearing everyone down, and had taken up the opinion that Subaru had been exhausted and had slept in the Library because of it.

In fact, although this was not present in Subaru’s memories, this party had just managed to cross the desert a few days ago.

Though Subaru had failed to cross the desert in just a few steps, it would have probably relatively difficult to fulfill that. No one disagreed with Emilia’s opinion.

This too could be said to be a change caused from Subaru’s speech. Even trivial words could sometimes derail that day’s schedule. He must take care in what he said and did.

With that in his mind, Subaru would confront Julius head-on. And, tucking his chin in response to his words, he said.

Subaru: “I want to talk about last night.”

The effect of these words was immediate.

Julius: “————”

Receiving Subaru’s words, great and complex emotions floated in his yellow eyes.

Seeing the immediate effect his response had brought, Subaru deepened his belief in his own deduction.

Subaru: “Come. Let’s change location.”

Julius: “——Alright.”

Julius followed along with a look of resignation at Subaru’s invitation, which he gave whilst jerking his chin.

Just like that, Subaru led Julius and brought him to a suitable place for conversation in a room on the Fourth Floor. Naturally, it was a secret talk in which others could not be permitted to intrude upon.

Subaru: “Well, I wonder where will I start from…”

Inside this cramped room, Subaru turned his head around, and confronted Julius.

There was a slight feeling of tension, but he did not want to make a mistake such as revealing that. The thought that he should, to some extent, stand emotionally superior allowed him to show his boldness.

On the other hand, the way Julius looked was complex, reading what lay in heart was difficult. But, it seemed to be something that must not be a feeling of composure, that had persisted from the place of breakfast before.

Subaru: “First of all, about last night.”

To start things off, Subaru abruptly cut to the main point in an introductory manner.

Currently, he had the emotional upper hand, but his opponent had an overwhelming advantage with what he knew. In the first place, Subaru really did not know all too much about what had transpired the night before.

Nevertheless, perhaps last night, Subaru and Julius must have done something in the Library. As a result of that “something”, Subaru thought that perhaps he had lost his memories.

Julius: “About last… night.”

Repeating Subaru's words, Julius closed his eyes, bordered by long eyelashes. Subaru consciously kept breathing out deep, long breaths as he stood in front of the handsome man.

He mustn't be overwhelmed. At least, it was that his feeling was to not lose.

Julius: "When it comes to that talk, we said it was a thing that ended at that place. At least, that is what I was thinking, but is it different for you?"

Subaru: "——Ahhh, not quite. I mustn't have grasped it."

Seeing Julius join in the talk, Subaru replied in turn.

Julius's voice was devoid of any intonation, and so to speak he was careful so that he did not reveal more emotions than necessary. Of course, when it came to Subaru receiving that, he chose the option of snapping at it.

Julius: "Grasped it…? I see, well, that sounds just like you. In short, you are saying you want me to postpone the feelings I hold, and solve the issues of your own self, is that? Is that not… a little too selfish?"

Subaru: "That's a bit off, and that's not what we're talking about. I'm certainly not happy with it, but are you trying to look happy about it? We're both walking around with anger in our hearts, and you're saying I have to look like nothing's wrong? You think I could do that?"

Julius: "——Well then, exactly what other option is there?"

Julius had been quietly keeping a check on his emotions. But, little-by-little, emotion started to flow out from his voice.

Even Subaru could feel Julius staring at him, with a furious gaze; Subaru of course was still unaware of the details behind Julius's outburst.

What choice did Subaru want to hear?

What kind of choice had Julius taken regarding Subaru, with him holding such fury? And when it came to Subaru, how had he let Julius choose that option?

Julius: “My feelings are as I said last night, and I am not going to keep mentioning it. Since I had not even noticed you and Anastasia-sama… and your connivery with Echidna.”

Subaru: “Me and my connivery with Echidna…?”

An unexpected fact had leapt out, and this time it was Subaru who had been caught unaware.

By the information he had at the present, Subaru was supposed to be part of a group with Emilia at the top. Julius and Echidna—— their situation, was that he was in a master and servant sort of role with Anastasia, the original owner of Echidna’s body. He also heard that they were in an opposing sort of relationship with the girls, if he looked at the big picture.

But, he had said Subaru had been conniving with Echidna.

Julius: “I know you did not possess ill intentions doing that. I cannot say it was enough, but I have exchanged words with Echidna. She can be trusted… No, there is no other way but to trust her.”

Subaru: “————”

Julius: “I have nothing except pursuing that possibility in order to save Anastasia-sama… Even if we get her back, and even if she does not remember me.”

Julius uttered these words, an awfully lonely tone of voice tinging his expression.

Subaru had heard about his circumstances as well.

Just like Ram’s sleeping younger sister, and many people from many different towns, Julius too was afflicted by this. He had been told that they had faced an awful experience similar to a curse in which they were forgotten by others.

Even if Echidna returned control to the rightful owner of the body, it would be highly unlikely that Anastasia would remember her Knight, Julius.

Even so——

Julius: “——I have not changed what I have set out to do, I do not know what you wish to drag out from me, but let me tell you just this, beforehand.”

Subaru: "…What is it?"

Julius: "For goodness's sake… please do not make me miserable in front of you again."

As soon as Subaru heard Julius's feeble voice, no words escaped him.

Subaru: "————"

However, in the back of his chest, there was just a feeling of discomposure. Subaru kept silent.

Julius took a look at Subaru, loosening his lips so that he could let out a faint sigh,

Julius: "It seems apparent this will be a barren exchange from here."

Saying that, Julius turned to face away from Subaru and was about to leave the room. Then, just before leaving the room, Julius stopped just once.

And whilst still not turning his head, he said,

Julius: "You having mentioned last night's talk left me quite shocked—— What ought I do, if you were to speak an apology?"

Subaru: "If I were to apologize…?"

Julius: "I wonder how I would have replied to you then. Though even that is something I do not know anymore."

Julius left the room, leaving behind the echo of self-derision in that mutter.

After making sure that he was not in sight, Subaru let out a long sigh. He suddenly felt exhausted, as if a great stone had been placed on his back. He was sweating copiously.

He felt like he had become a vehemently detestable person.

???: "——Master, was that okay with you?"

Shaula showed up and peered into the room. Subaru let out a "Haa", seeing her quite indifferent manner. And then, placing his hand to his forehead, he nodded his head with a "It was okay".

Subaru: “In that state he’s in, perhaps Julius didn’t have anything to do with the Library… But the distrust in myself sure grew still a little bit stronger.”

Shaula: “I don’t really get it, but was I useful for you, Master?”

Subaru: “——Ahh, indeed. Thanks to you, I was able to face Julius, and get some peace of mind.”

Shaula: “Hehehehe, that’s good~. Then, then, then, Master, Master…”

Shaula was delighted, making her body squirm, her cheeks were blushed in red. She was making her way towards Subaru. And then, she nervously stretched her hands out,

Shaula: “I want a really tight hug as a reward!”

Subaru: “No way!”

Shaula: “Ehhhh!? How mean! Master, didn’t you say you’d listen to what I’d say if I didn’t deviate from the reward *teido*[152]!?”

Subaru: “That wish goes far beyond my pure, and innocent heart…”

Subaru bluntly rejected Shaula’s excessive hopes and dreams for close skin-to-skin contact.

Nonetheless, it was true that Shaula had been lying in wait, giving him enough composure in his heart to confront Julius.

When he had called out to Julius, Subaru had kept Shaula in wait in the adjoining room as backup.

The reason he had chosen her was because, between all the other girls, she seemed to be the most athletic, as well as that she seemed to listen to favors as she liked Subaru. It was as a result of calculation that she seemed willing to help him without asking too many questions.

Other than that, from amongst the suspects, the girl whose dead body he had found first, was the least likely to pose a danger from all of them. In any case——

[152] Engrish flip. Means “class/grade” (程度), originally “レベル” (level).

Subaru: “My thoughts that Julius had been the opponent who stole my memories at the Library, were way off the mark…”

This morning, he had thought it was almost a certainty from his reaction when he’d seen Subaru. But that line of thinking had been off.

Despite what happened at the Library, the Julius of some time ago did not really touch much on the incident in which his memories of him had been lost. Having said that, his emotions were all too natural for an act.

It was quite uncertain what sort of intentions “Natsuki Subaru” had in engaging in connivery with Echidna. But, at least, it was a good enough reason for Subaru now to harbor distrust towards the him of last night.

Before his memories had been lost, it seemed like there had been quite the exchange of tempestuous words between him, Echidna and Julius.

Subaru: “You… what on earth were you doing, and who on earth targeted you, «Natsuki Subaru»…”

Shaula: “Maaaster, how about you jump to my chest? Come hug my busty body, Master.”

Subaru: “That wish is beyond naïve!”

Shaula: “Master is mean~!”

Speaking of things he had no clue about, Subaru also had no clue why Shaula showered him with such strange affection.

Why did she dearly love Subaru to this extent? It appeared that Emilia, and everyone else around her, also had no clue why she did. It was said it was something to make convenient use of—— but, was it really like that?

His connivery with Echidna, the blurriness of last night’s deeds, and in the first place, his relationship with the girls—— as far as he was concerned, right , the being Subaru least knew of, was “Natsuki Subaru”, including those relationships he could not discuss.

What kind of ulterior motive were these girls and those others, involved in[153]?

——Was “Natsuki Subaru” even truly associated with them?

Subaru: “Crap, my thoughts have come to a dead end… Let’s go where Patrasche is for a bit?”

For the time being, he wanted to go to a place where could settle down and think. When thinking that, the first thing that came to the current Subaru’s mind as his greatest ally, was most certainly that jet-black ground dragon.

There was no choice but to put his faith in the one who had staked their life protecting him, regardless of whether he had his memories or not.

Shaula: “Ehhh, that ground dragon~? That ground dragon isn’t really my cup of tea since it keeps glaring at me.”

Subaru: “You, insults against Patrasche are unforgivable! Even if this world became a world in which anyone’s insults were permissible, I won’t forgive any insults at Patrasche.”

Shaula: “Master, how whipped does that dragon have you!?”

Shaula raised her voice into something like a shriek, but Subaru took absolutely no notice of it.

In any case, it was because he now wanted to be lost in his thoughts in peace, by Patrasche’s side. At any rate, their original aim, the Tower’s capture, would begin straight after lunch.

Since he had concealed his amnesia, there would be no way of stopping it.

Subaru: “That’s why we’re parting here as well. See you in a bit.”

Shaula: “Uwaaah~, you were colluding even for the reward. But even so, I caaaaan’t~ bear it. I’m a woman for Master’s convenience, that’s the meaning of my life.”

Subaru: “————”

[153] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “To be more accurate, «the girls» probably refer to the Emilia Camp exclusively”.

As he tried to leave the room, Shaula spoke this out, and gave him a cold goodbye. Receiving her words, Subaru held his breath.

Whilst still keeping his back turned away from her, Subaru hung his head down, and closed his eyes.

Subaru: “Where in Natsuki Subaru is the worth in going that far?”

Shaula: “——? Master?”

Subaru: “——Hk! Ah, damn it!”

Unable to bear the irritation welling up in him, Subaru roughly scratched his head, and turned around so he was facing Shaula who was inclining her head.

And then, walking towards the immobile girl, he stretched out both of his hands and with all of his might, he embraced her slender body.

Shaula: “——Hk.”

Subaru: “You shouldn’t think of yourself as just a woman for convenience, or things like that. It was my bad.”

Subaru was going to end up becoming the same as “Natsuki Subaru” were he to just make a one-sided use of her.

Shaula’s breath hitched and her body stiffened at Subaru’s behavior, in having refused to become like so.

Shaula was tall, approximately the same height as Subaru.

But even so, her body which he had embraced was slender, supple and soft. There was quite the difference between her body, and that of his own body.

Shaula: “Master…”

Subaru: “You helped me out by being there… That is all.”

Shaula: “————”

Around thirty seconds had passed while hugging Shaula.

Subaru slowly let go of her body. In all honesty, he felt awkward, but his sense of achievement was stronger. If he were to become a guy who just handed out gifts like that.

If he were to become the same as "Natsuki Subaru"——

Shaula: "Masteeer…"

Looking at the pensive Subaru, Shaula dizzily walked towards him, her cheeks fiercely blushing. Her eyes were wet with tears, her breathing was somewhat feverish, and she was gazing at Subaru's lips,

Shaula: "Master, finally you've shown me some love…"

Subaru: "Beyond naïve!"

Shaula: "Gueh!"

Pushing her face away with his palm, Subaru snapped Shaula back to reality.

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Subaru: "Whether or not I reward you, you get carried away… What a difficult character…"

Subaru had somehow managed to calm down the aroused Shaula, and extracted himself out of the situation. He sighed.

Eventually, Shaula had left, still in a dreamy state of mind, with the words "It's the mark of a good woman to see when it's time to leave as well. *Hiketsu ga onna o onna ni suru*[154]".

In all honesty, even though he had no clue what the meaning of this was, meddling into it would be all too bothersome.

[154] Engrish flip. Means "secret(s) make a woman a woman" (秘密が女を女にする), originally "シークレットメイクスウーマンウーマンッス" (secret makes a woman a woman). This appears to be a Detective Conan reference.

Subaru: “Since sometimes, there are things that you need not know in the world.”

In any case, contrary to such a careless act, Subaru’s situation was not looking great.

At the very least, he expected what happened in the Library to come to light if he pecked at Julius. But, as now it had missed its mark, he had once again returned to square one.

Or, as he had first posited, were the others not at all involved in Subaru’s missing memories? Though, it had been only Ram’s facial expression that he had not been able to check——

Subaru: “She looked like she was in tears, but I don’t know any more if they were just crocodile tears…”

It had been Ram who had tried her hardest to not believe the story that Subaru had really lost his memories.

Of course there was still the possibility that she had been acting, it was a possibility that she had not been able to recognize some sort of participation happening, but there were no limits to these sorts of suggestions.

If he did not place his trust in something, then it was certainly a fact that he could not even start to doubt something. As far as Subaru is concerned, that basis was——

Subaru: “——That means Patrasche now.”

After asserting that, he was shocked at himself for being the conclusion of a person who fell into a pitfall of bearing complete mistrust for everyone around him.

But in fact, it was true that that side of him was quite prominent. His complete mistrust for everyone was indescribable, tantamount to it being deeply ingrained. And it was not just towards others, but now, he also could not believe in himself.

Subaru: “Still, it might be more a blessing if I got to spend some time in a paradise in which just Patrasche and ground dragons are…”

???: “——Ahh, I heard thaaat~!”

Subaru: “Wooah!?”

At the very moment in which he had been voicing these thoughts out loud, a young girl nimbly rushed out from the corner of the aisleway. The little girl was Meili, her blue braids swinging about as she stifled a giggle.

Subaru wearily dropped his shoulders at the figure of the young girl who had heard his dull thoughts voiced out.

Subaru: “It’s just something like a joke or nonsense. Surely you didn’t get that?”

Meili: “I’m suuure~. But, I don’t particularly intend to laugh at them even if they’re onii-san’s true feelings you knooow~. Because if there’s a place where you can just live with some bad animal-chans, then I think it’s somewhere I wouldn’t mind living in.”

Subaru: “…Huh.”

Whilst hearing Subaru fumbling excuses, Meili held her skirt by the hem in a gesture which Subaru could not tell whether it was meant to be elegant or wild.

Even if he had gotten an answer from that, he really did not know what sort of reply to give. However, she did not seem to be pleased by that reply.

Meili: “Ah, siiince~ I gave a vague answer. Since a person took the trouble to diligently give a speech, I thiiink~ that not listening to it properly is the mark of a naughty child.”

Subaru: “That’s not much of an apology… You’re alone? You aren’t with Beatrice?”

Meili: “No chance! Why would I be with Beatrice-chan? Buuut~, I think that is a question I’d rather ask of you, onii-san.”

He had thought that girls of a similar age would be hanging out together, yet it seemed that it was not so.

Certainly, the times in which Beatrice had acted together with Emilia were many—— that was why he treated his misgivings for the two of them as a set, he was unable to think of them separately.

Subaru: “Well, still, that’s fine. Though, just so you know, I don’t have time to play with you. I’m sorry, but look elsewhere if you want to speak to someone. Shaula’s back there for example.”

Meili: “I could talk to naked onee-san, buuut~ right now I have stuff to do with onii-san.”

Subaru: “With me?”

Though Subaru did not want to be disturbed during the time he had set to plunge into his unavoidable brooding, in his secret “date” with Patrasche, he could not help widen his eyes at Meili’s unexpected introduction.

Thinking about it, the little girl was quite similar to Shaula, in that she was easy to talk to compared to Emilia and the others. Even in her last moments in the last loop, her corpse had not been left in a state mutilated to the point of being too painful to even look at.

Since she had looked as if she had died in her sleep, even when he was directly opposite to her, the shocking images would not overlap with her. His heartbeat had calmed as well.

Subaru: “What is it? Is it quick?”

Meili: “Yeah, it wooon’t~ take particularly long.”

Subaru felt an overwhelming sense of security; he lent out an ear to listen to Meili’s story. And then, seeing Subaru adjust his posture to indicate he was willing to listen, Meili placed a finger to her lips and licked the fingertip with her tongue.

This somewhat alluring gesture did not fit her childish appearance. Subaru frowned at it.

Meili: “——I wooonder~, just how seriously should I take what we talked about last night?”

This was what the little girl said to Subaru, whilst still smiling sweetly.

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Subaru: “——Hm, oh?”

Suddenly, Subaru was set free from the strange stoppage in his consciousness, and grasped his own neck.

There was something in his throat like a feeling of acridity and breathlessness. He launched into a coughing fit.

Subaru: “Cough, cough…”

Whilst touching his throat, Subaru coughed over and over again as he relished a sensation similar to parched pain.

And then, he suddenly took notice.

Subaru: “Huh, I…”

——What was it that he had been doing?

Just before, he had for sure talked to Julius, then there had been that farce with Shaula, and after that he had tried to go to where Patrasche was. And, finally, he had met Meili halfway there——

Subaru: “Ow…”

Subaru had been rubbing his arm as he was immersed in thought; he clucked his tongue in sharp pain.

Looking down at his hand—— both of his hands. A bunch of scratch marks were carved on the wrists of both his left and right hand. He realized that blood was painfully oozing out of them.

Subaru: “Tch, what the hell is this…!”

The wounds were relatively deep, but, the wounds themselves were irregular.

Them being scratch marks was not a bad guess, they could not be from a sharp blade. They were wounds which had been caused by someone digging their nails deeply into his flesh with all their might.

Where on earth had he got these wounds from——

Subaru: “——Ah?”

Subaru surveyed his surroundings to see if there was anything he could use as a bandage whilst grimacing in pain.

And, he noticed that he was in a stone room, similar to many others on the Fourth Floor. And then, he finally noticed it.

Subaru: “————”

White feet were strewn on the floor.

The feet were unmoving, the strength in them had fizzled out. He slowly shifted his gaze up from their feet; there was a skirt, and the upper part of their body, and then.

And then——

Subaru: “——Wha?”

And then, right there, the figure of a little girl who did not even twitch was collapsed in front of him.

——Meili was collapsed in front of Subaru’s eyes, her breathing non-existent.

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Setowi (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 44 - Medal of Blood

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 3 “Tower of the Living”, Parts 3 (near the end)-4

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

Within the stone room, Subaru was gazing down at his hands in shock at seeing the small girl who lay limp just beneath his eyes.

Subaru: “————”

He could not understand what had just happened.

His wrists were wounded, his throat felt acrid, and his heart was racing. However, those things did not seem to be linked with his memory, he could only think of them was like glitches that had been born within the voids of his mind.

Apart from the physical evidence that remained, any traces of anyone had vanished.

Only one thing was certain, only one thing——

——The light within the eye of the little girl that lay in front of him had been extinguished.

Subaru: “——Guh, it’s still too early to give up.”

His breathing chaotic, Subaru shook his head and rushed over towards the girl who was lying face up.

His feet, with each step he took, were heavy, and his movements were sluggish, as if the soles of his shoes were glued to the floor. Somehow, he managed to peel his shoes off the floor and stooped down beside the girl—— Meili.

Subaru: “————”

Meili lay there motionless, her pale arms in spread-eagled fashion, her mouth half-open. She had an expression that seemed like one of shock frozen on her face, and her lightless eyes seemed to be out of focus.

The girl had always given off a hard-to-figure-out impression, however her figure now only made that impression stronger——

Subaru: “M-Meili… Oy, Meili!”

He called out to her.

But there was no reaction.

Since his appeal had not roused her, Subaru shook her shoulders and tried to slap her cheek lightly, in the hopes of seeing a response.

But yet again, there was no response from her. Her eyelids, which remained open, did not even blink.

Subaru: “Me…”

Stopping himself, Subaru took a deep breath and decided that he would try to resuscitate her using what he recalled.

Putting his hands on her chest, he remembered learning how to administer emergency chest compressions. He remembered that the heart’s position was about two fingers’ length away from the top of the stomach and such. With this in mind, he started to push his palms down on her chest.

Subaru: “Haa… haaaaa…! Meili! Hey, Meili!”

Meili: “————”

Subaru: “Fuck!”

There was no reply. With a pale face, her body feebly shook.

Cursing the situation he was in, Subaru brought her head up and secured her airway in preparation for giving her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The process of cardiopulmonary resuscitation included administering both chest compressions and artificial breathing.

Subaru: “What next. There’s something else. What is it, what is it, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK!”

Desperately clawing at his memory, Subaru searched for anything else that he could do.

However, he had obtained this smattering of knowledge from watching television; in the end, it was only half-complete. The more desperately he tried to resuscitate her, the more Subaru’s arms succumbed to fatigue, the more it started to feel like a fruitless attempt.

Simply, in the end, he was repeating the actions of chest compressions, followed by mouth-to-mouth, over and over again.

He could not feel any trace of a heartbeat against his palms whilst he pressed down on her chest. He could not get any response from the girl’s body even when he was breathing air into her lungs.

Continuing to administer CPR to the limit of his strength, he——

Subaru: “——Damn, it.”

Breathing in exhaustion and sweating profusely from his forehead, Subaru fell back towards the ground.

Subaru: “Haaa, haa… Fuck, fuuuck…!”

Clutching his fringe in frustration, Subaru could only swear.

Meili had not shown any signs of breathing. His first impression had been correct.

The light within this little girl’s eyes would never shine again.

——Meili, had died.

Ruthlessly, fate had snatched away this young girl’s life so cruelly. Such an expression was mere consolation and was not suitable in this place.

It had not been fate that had killed her. She had been murdered by someone.

Meili's neck was blemished by a series of bluish-black bruises, serving as proof.

Subaru: "————"

Catching his breath and filled with regret, Subaru looked towards his hands. Until now, both of those hands had been used in an attempt to save Meili's life—— on his wrists, both his left and his right, there were numerous amounts of scratches grooved into them as if done by fingernails.

Quite entirely as if someone had scratched and clawed at them with all their might as if it was a life and death situation.

He was not so ignorant to not understand what it meant.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru got up and fixed Meili's disheveled appearance.

He adjusted her disorderly clothing, crossed her arms across her chest, and closed her eyelids. And, while he paid his respects to her corpse, he gently placed his hand against her thin neck.

Sensing a bad feeling about it, he traced his fingers against the bluish-black hues left on Meili's neck.

Subaru: "…A perfect match."

His parched muttering came without any strength or surprise, and it only reaffirmed this fact.

The bruises left on Meili's neck looked like they had been caused by fingers—— and to the untrained eye, the shapes of those fingers matched exactly with Subaru's own.

No longer would he doubt the facts here.

Meili had been strangled to death.

And the culprit was no other than——

Subaru: "——Uh, gah."

As soon as he realized this fact, the feeling of wanting to vomit ran up Subaru's throat. He turned his face quickly and rolled to the side, so he could avoid befouling Meili's body.

Subaru's breakfast had been in his stomach for only a short while, and that was what came out. Emptying his stomach's contents onto the floor, Subaru vomited until his stomach was completely empty.

Subaru: "I'm, really, done, puking…"

Wiping his mouth with his sleeve, Subaru mocked himself.

In fact, remembering how many times he had vomited now was something he was unable to do. This may have been the first time today, but last time it had been today, it had happened a terrible amount of times.

He felt that as of now he would not be able to stomach any food anymore. Subaru felt like apologizing with all his heart to all the farmers around the country.

His mind would likely crack and break into little pieces if he were not conscious of thinking such absurd thoughts.

Subaru: "————"

The circumstantial evidence presented, matched too well.

There had been two people in the room, and the bruises on Meili's neck matched Subaru's fingers. Subaru was not optimistic enough to believe that he could escape the blame in this situation.

He did not even think someone had framed him.

The addition of another person's hands was not required to create this situation. If someone had framed him here, then this place transcended all known dimensions.

If hands were needed to create this nightmare, then only two were necessary.

——Since Natsuki Subaru possessed two arms, then surely that was enough?

Subaru: "…I don't understand the meaning of this."

Having accepted this reality head-on, Subaru put his lack of understanding into words.

Inexplicable, baffling, incomplete, regardless of the term used to describe this scene, it would be impossible to reproduce it—— he could only conclude that the crime had been perpetrated by Natsuki Subaru.

However, Subaru did not hold such a memory within himself.

Subaru: "What happened, what happened? Remember. Remember, remember, remember…"

He stood up and walked around the room, trying to wrench open his memories.

He had died, then woke up and met up with Emilia, Beatrice and Patrasche. He had hidden the fact that he had lost his memories of them and then eaten breakfast. He had tried to interrogate Julius whilst Shaula secretly kept an eye on them, before then hugging her. Then he came across Meili in the corridor.

Finally, Meili had stated she had some business with him, and wanted to talk to him about something——

Subaru: "Last night, she mentioned last night…"

Frowning at his vague memories, Subaru ruminated over Meili's words.

However, shortly after she had tried to talk about it, Subaru had slipped out of consciousness. The words she had uttered had shattered into a thousand pieces, just like the thoughts one could get on the verge of falling asleep.

Subaru: "Night, I was asked about the night. Of that, I'm sure. Before I woke up, or before I went to bed? Either way, she asked me about one or the other… and then?"

From there, he did not know anymore.

The only thing he could fathom about the contents of what Meili had asked Subaru, was that it was related to his evening excursion[155]. Something he too wanted to know about.

[155] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "More like «behavior of the evening» but «evening excursion» sounds snappier."

Emilia and such had told him that, this morning, Subaru had been found collapsed in the Library.

Subaru's behavior during the night, before he had collapsed, was completely unknown to him. At least now there was no doubt that the incident was related to his memory loss.

And surely, Meili remembered what Subaru had forgotten; there happened to be some connection, of that there was no mistake——

Subaru: "She's dead. And I strangled her…? Why did I do such a thing…?"

Looking down at both of his hands, although not present in his memories, he felt that it revived a raw sensation in his palms.

Both arms had squeezed her neck until the girl's breath had stopped. There was evidence on his wrists that showed that Meili had desperately tried to resist.

If he looked carefully, there was blood left in Meili's fingernails, the evidence of a fight.

Very deep fingernail marks had been left there on his arms; he could not help but feel like this had been the echo of a deep-seated resentment that the little girl had left behind.

Subaru: "——Ah?"

Subaru's thinking had been gripped by the reins of delusion, and suddenly he let out a hoarse gasp.

He had gasped as if he had been taken aback by something, the cause being his arm. The wounds at the vicinity of his wrists were not that which he was staring at. He was looking at his right hand's fingernails.

Just like Meili, his fingernails were jam-packed with blood and flakes of skin as if he had scratched someone.

Subaru: "————"

With these baffling bloodstains in mind, Subaru turned to face Meili's corpse again.

Showing respect to her death, he had fixed up her disheveled appearance. It was not of great consolation, but except for her bluish-black bruises on her neck, the little girl's corpse still looked as cute as she did in life.

At least, there were no traces of any fingernail scars visible on her body. Subaru's fingernails were unkempt and hideous, and there were no traces of such pitiful gouge-marks on her body.

Then the remains of skin and blood left stuffed inside his nails—— what were these vestiges of harmful intent?

Subaru: "——No way."

He looked down at the arm that had been hurting him; Subaru's lips quivered as he got a bad feeling about it.

Fresh in his mind was the fact that, from the elbow of his right arm, there was a grotesque black coloration to it. But it had been his left arm that was throbbing in pain.

Subaru started to slowly roll up his sleeve, all the way up to the pit of his elbow, where the source of the pain was coming from. He felt the fabric trying to stick to his arm, dried blood peeling off as he continued to unroll his sleeve.

Taking a sharp breath, Subaru finished rolling his sleeves all the way to his shoulder.

There he saw his own left arm bleeding quite a bit, and Subaru let out the breath he had taken.

Subaru: "————"

He scraped away the dark-red blood that was dirtying his arm with his fingers, and gazed at the wound that had been bringing him this pain.

As he had imagined, there were scratches in his skin, as if it had been carved by his own right hand. From the inside of his elbow all the way to his upper arm, there was a wound that had been painfully carved into it. However, it was not merely just an ordinary wound.

There were characters.

Carved there on his flesh by fingernails, were some crudely etched characters.

Engraved there, it said,

——“Natsuki Subaru was here”.[156]

Subaru: “——Ahh.”

It was as if his breath had been knocked out of him.

Subaru wiped the scar left on his left arm with his fingers to see if he had been mistaken. Over and over again. Once the flow of blood had stopped, he rubbed the wound once more and confirmed it.

There was no other way of reading it. No matter how he looked at it, it was written as “Natsuki Subaru was here”. The handwriting was messy, written in Japanese, and said, “Natsuki Subaru was here”.

It was easy to understand. It was a very easy-to-understand self-assertion. It was like when the criminal left evidence at the scene of the crime as proof of his own crime. Leaving behind the name had clearly conveyed who had committed this crime. How kind of him, what ambition, oh how must he have craved being in the limelight——

Subaru: “You… What is it with you!?”

In the face of such unacceptable facts, Subaru’s voice shook as he shouted out in grief. Shaking his left arm, and keeping it far away from him whilst turning his face away from it, his feet ended up getting tangled.

He fell flat on his backside. Subaru’s left arm hit the floor and his teeth clattered together. Many, many times he banged his arm on the floor over and over again. He bit his lip as the pain in his bone resounded, blood began to pool out of his mouth.

But even so, the reality of the situation would not change. The wounds on his arms would not disappear.

[156] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Fun fact, this was carved into the Flugel tree in the anime as «Flugel was here», in Season 1 Episode 19, and they were also the words he wrote on paper when studying at the mansion, in Season 1 Episode 6”. Furthermore, you can also see kid Subaru graffiti this on a wall in Season 2 Episode 4.

Subaru: “This wasn’t there! There was no such wound here!”

Shaking his head in refusal, Subaru cried out his appeal that his wound was something that had happened after the loss of his consciousness, in the room where there only the motionless Meili lay.

The wound on his left arm had been newly created, he had never noticed it before. Someone had strangled Meili, and had scratched him as well—— no, that was not it.

No, no! That was absolutely wrong. It was all wrong.

Admit it. Understand it. He ought to know. It had not been someone else. It had not been performed by another being—— this crime had been committed by Natsuki Subaru.

It had not been Subaru, it had been “Natsuki Subaru” who had killed Meili and carved this medal in his arm to show off his achievement.

Subaru: “Cra… zy.”

Insane. Crazy. It seemed he was going insane.

——Was “Natsuki Subaru” the name of a monster that he just could not comprehend?

Subaru: “————”

This was not the first time Subaru had held great distrust of “Natsuki Subaru”.

“Natsuki Subaru” would obviously repeat non-sensical actions, starting with the unusual behavior from the previous night, which was yet to be answered.

When he had questioned Julius, he had heard of his misdeeds with Echidna from him, and how those actions had driven Julius into some sort of mental anguish—— the Subaru that came back from the convenience store, and the “Natsuki Subaru” here, no longer resembled the same person. As if it was a counterfeit version of him[157].

[157] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “The gist seems to be okay, but I feel like this part’s translation could be improved here”.

Subaru was seriously convinced that his body possessed a completely different being inside it.

Subaru: “But, that’s not right…”

Although it annoyed him to, if he paid close attention to the scar engraved on his left arm, he would not be able to deny his suspicion.

His name had been engraved on his arm. Of course, it was quite different from how he would write it using a pen or a brush. However, there was a certain peculiarity within how the letters were written.

Specifically, there was a certain habit that Subaru had when doing calligraphy. Unless one were to deliberately copy them, it would be practically impossible for someone else to have coincidentally written it like this.

In other words, it was unmistakable that Subaru’s handwriting and “Natsuki Subaru’s” handwriting had the same origin.

As soon as he had noticed that, the facts became clear. That was——

Subaru: “——When I lost my consciousness, did «Natsuki Subaru» return?”

And then that “Natsuki Subaru” had had some form of argument with Meili, and ended up killing her. He had then left that fact behind in his arm, and then gotten back to hiding in the confines of his consciousness?

Just that, he truly did not understand.

Subaru: “Why are you using my body when you have your o… Why… my… No, what on earth am I? What are you planning to do!? Who the hell are you…”

Clutching his face, Subaru’s voice trembled as he muttered this. In this different world in which he had no allies, in this different world in which he could not tell who the enemy was, in this different world where he could not discern between friend and foe, in the end, Subaru had removed even himself from the frame of innocence.

Subaru: “————”

He was staggering around, barely able to keep upright as the feeling of anxiety overwhelmed his heart.

Subaru attempted to take long, deep breaths to ward off this overpowering feeling.

He could not remain calm. His mind was in complete disarray.

But, as it was currently, he wished not to be brandished about by whatever will "Natsuki Subaru" possessed without knowing about them. And so——

Subaru: "——Who are you?"

Whilst muttering words of hatred at the impossibility reflected in his arm, Subaru placed his left index fingernail against his right arm. He placed it right against the grotesque looking skin, and began etching that on his arm.

Droplets of red blood were oozing from his black skin.

——He thought it ironic that the blood flowing from his black skin was red.

Arc 6 Chapter 45 – Embrace of the Guilty

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 3 “Tower of the Living”, Part 5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (GracedHarperd, Ice/Ice_Occultism, PaperLightning, Ringo) — Complete

——A painful red drop of blood dripped down his right arm with the black spots pattern.

Fortune or not, it seemed that his right arm’s durability was no different from that of a normal human body’s, despite having undergone a drastic change.

If he dug his nails in, he would feel pain. With enough force, and the skin would be torn, and blood would flow.

Even though it felt like the blood from that wound had stopped quickly, it really did not feel that different.

Subaru: “————”

He proceeded to wipe the blood from his palm and then pulled down his sleeve, leaving a blurry trace of blood on his right arm. Even though it had been his own doing, it was something he did not wish to see for long. Naturally, he had also brought down the sleeve of his left arm, as to conceal the inscription left there, “Natsuki Subaru was here”.

Subaru: “In any case, I need to hurry…”

Already he had wasted quite a lot of time in this room.

Meili’s corpse was still lying in the middle of the room, but at least there no longer was any trace of what he had done to her.

If he could, he would have liked to avoid defiling her corpse even more, and mourn her death.

——There was still one last thing he must do.

Subaru: "————"

With it providing little resistance, he put both of his hands under the girl's armpits, and so Subaru dragged the girl's body to a corner of the room.

There, he found what could be the original equipment of an abandoned room.

It could be called a table made of stone, or perhaps those were beddings. For now, he gently hid Meili's dead body behind that hewed square stone slab.

——*Sorry*, although, despite apologizing to Meili from the bottom of his heart, still Subaru concealed her fate.

After all, were he to confide what he had concealed, who in the world would be able to defend Subaru in this situation?

With Subaru being unable to discern the true intentions of "Natsuki Subaru", who else could?

Subaru: "There's no defense, huh. Even if I wasn't the one who… killed Meili, the murder were definitely my own hands."

He was not aware about how criminal investigations were handled in this world, but once the jury saw Meili's nails and the wounds on Subaru's wrists, they would unanimously convict Subaru.

And Subaru had no grounds to challenge nor to appeal such a decision.

Were it to ever come to that, the only thing he could do was to try to avoid the trial—— no, he had already covered up the crime.

He was aware that the course of actions he took was not the correct one, neither was it the best one. However, Subaru possessed no alternatives—— he no longer knew who he could trust, who could he doubt.

However, if there was a single thing that he was convinced of, it was——

Subaru: “Next time we meet, Meili… you will be the only one I won’t suspect.”

Annihilated, then strangled, and so this was the second time Subaru had found Meili already dead.

At this point, he suspected Meili less than anyone else, at the very least. But that admission mattered not, there was no way to get any kind of information from her anymore.

The Closed Circle Mystery, in other words, a cliché where only the dead would be removed from the pool of suspects.

However, as a detective, Natsuki Subaru was equipped with a rule-breaking ability, Return by Death, which caused time to be rewound whenever he was killed. Anyone, no matter how useless, could become a renowned detective capable of dealing with any tragedy with this ability.

Subaru: “Though the detective being the culprit is also something predictable of these mystery tropes.”

It was regrettable, as no matter how great Return by Death might be, if the theory that the culprit was “Natsuki Subaru” was sound, the incidents would repeat many times over, and stopping him would prove to be a very difficult task.

A different personality of the detective being the criminal, was a pretty tired mystery trope. But, having noticed that, if the detective just threw himself off a cliff, the case would be solved, no?

Return by Death, and “the detective himself is the culprit”. When both of these met, the situation would become unsolvable. A so called, inescapable helix maze.

Subaru: “This isn’t the time to be talking…! In any case, right now I gotta buy time.”

It was not a problem that would be solved with time, but there was definitely something that time would bring along.

Believing in that, Subaru wished to be freed from this dead end, and then stood up.

Subaru: “————”

Leaving those circumstances aside, Subaru caressed Meili’s still forehead just one last time. Surely, she would wish for him not to touch her anymore.

Her forehead felt cold to the touch, as if she was rejecting Subaru.

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And, after despairingly concealing Meili's murder, Subaru left the room. Then, looking at the right and left of the aisle, as he left the site slowly——

???: "——Ah, Subaru! Thank god, so you were here."

Subaru: "——Hk!?"

It was Emilia's sudden voice that made Subaru's shoulder hitch up, as he turned back to look at her. Carrying herself with a sprinting pace, she tilted her head to Subaru whose cheeks had turned rigid,

Emilia: "Sorry, did I scare you?"

Subaru: "——I-I was surprised, that's, weeell~, that's, you know. It's just because it was so sudden. What happened, Emilia-chan?"

Emilia: "——? I was just walking around the Tower, to see whether I could do something until lunch. Rather than that, Subaru."

Subaru: "Yeah?"

Emilia: "Just now, were you playing around again?"

Subaru inhaled sharply at hearing Emilia's mysterious question.

Her amethyst eyes were staring right at Subaru, but Subaru did not know the meaning of her question.

It was true that his voice had been quaking, but what he had stated was supposed to be an incomplete, yet sufficient, answer.

Subaru: "————"

Well, rather than Emilia's gleeful eyes, Subaru tasted a sense of uncomfortableness, and gulped down his bitter saliva.

In the room behind them was Meili's dead body, cold and lifeless. Although he had made sure to keep it out of plain sight, were someone to search through the room, her body would be discovered within minutes.

So, leaving this place was his top priority.

Subaru: "Sorry, I need to go the washroom for a second."

Emilia: "Ah, sure."

Hurriedly leaving the room, Subaru left words that could easily be misunderstood.

He must get away, get away from Emilia as soon as possible, and go to place where he may kill time as much as he could. From there, he could take care of the wound on his right arm——

Subaru: "Eh, Emilia-chan? I'm going to the washroom. Why are you coming with me?"

Emilia: "Eh? I mean, we'll all get together for lunch anyway, so don't you think it would be nice if we're together for a while? Don't worry, I'll be outside the door."

Subaru: "I'm not worried about you hearing the sound of peeing but…"

Emilia stood in front of Subaru, who wanted to part ways with her, and looked at his face.

Good arguments were good arguments, but good arguments were something that could make the person they were directed at feel pain, basically. This case was no exception, and Subaru was left without anything to say to that fair reasoning.

However, on the other side of his struggles, Subaru carefully conjectured about Emilia's intentions.

——For what purpose had Emilia said that she wished to accompany Subaru?

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "——?"

Still, Emilia looked completely plain to Subaru, who was looking at her from the corner of his eyes.

Her lovable face made it seem like there was no plot in mind, but, in fact, she was one of the enemies he suspected most.

Subaru had not seen the dead bodies of either Emilia or Beatrice last time around, when everyone had been killed.

Although it was true that "Natsuki Subaru's" intentions were unknown because of the wounds on his arms, no matter how much chaos "Natsuki Subaru" could cause, it was not possible to produce such a situation alone.

Shaula, Echidna, Ram. Killing Julius and Meili as well, and eventually tearing down the Tower with the power of shadows, and finally beheading him, had been someone.

There still existed someone in this Tower who Subaru was not aware of.

Emilia: "Subaru, are you okay? Actually, you still aren't back to normal, are you?"

Subaru: "——Hk, I-I'm fine. I just got lost in my thoughts for a bit."

Emilia: "Really? But, you don't look too well."

Suddenly, Emilia reached out for Subaru.

Unable to brush her away, he allowed Emilia to fiddle with his cheeks as she pleased. Subaru's brow furrowed due to the ticklish sensation.

Subaru: "…You're looking quite closely."

Emilia: "Mhm, that's right, I'm looking closely. It feels like lately, I've been following you around with my eyes a lot… I don't know why, but it's strange."

Subaru: "——I guess so, it's really strange, isn't it."

He was carefully keeping an eye on Emilia's every move

The smiling Emilia's hand was touching Subaru's face. The situation would drastically change if Emilia's hand were to slit Subaru's throat in the blink of an eye, there were no guarantees she would not. Or rather, she did not even need to do that, with the strength of Emilia's arm, it would be possible for her to easily break Subaru's neckbones.

However, there was no maliciousness or hostility to be felt from her hands, and Subaru was at loss on what to think.

After all, Subaru—— he was only student in peaceful Japan, who had been on the way home from a convenience store, so it was only natural that Subaru would not find these feelings reliable. Things like people's hostility or malice, he had almost no experience with these things.

Subaru's familiarity with moods that made even very faraway people awkward, and with the silence of apathetic indifference that could not even be called cold disdain—— neither of these were able to hurt the loner Natsuki Subaru.

Henceforth, he did not know if the feeling he was getting from the girl's amethyst eyes in front of him was genuine or fake.

But, if he did not know——

Subaru: "————"

He wondered what kind of face she would make if he were to confess everything.

How great would it feel, if he were to screw up that beautiful face she had that made it seem like she had grown up only ever seeing splendid things, as if there was nothing to worry about in the world?

——The Natsuki Subaru you are worried about is nowhere to be found.

——No, that's not it. What if I were to say that he's a cruel, crazed murderer[158]*.*

Emilia: "——By the way, about Meili."

[158] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "He here uses «あいつ», which is a distant way of referring to something. «This guy» would have been the usual way of translating, but since he's sort of speaking about his old self, a simple «he» was chosen instead."

Subaru: "——Hk."

A strangled noise emerged from Subaru's throat as his eyes opened wide.

Why had Meili's name been mentioned here? He could not hide his exclamation of surprise not in the slightest, it had been a complete surprise attack. If Emilia's was aim to gauge Subaru's reaction, he had fallen for it, hook, line, and sinker.

However, Emilia had her eyes off Subaru; her gaze had dropped down towards the floor. She was not looking towards the aisleway he had come from, it felt more like as if she was just looking around the whole Tower.

And following from that, Emilia showed a slight hint of hesitation, and said,

Emilia: "I wonder if I was too short-tempered with her. When we return safe and sound from this Tower, we'll talk on what we can do about Meili."

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "Of course, what she did a year ago was terrible, and I understand Otto-kun's point that we shouldn't believe her so easily, but… it was thanks to Meili that we were able to cross the Sand Dunes, and if she had been plotting something against us, I think she would have done it before we reached this Tower."

Pinching the cuffs of her clothes, Emilia carefully stated her thoughts.

Although he felt he should take her story with a grain of salt. Amongst the people in this Tower, Meili's position was special. She had apparently originally been an assassin hired to take Emilia and Beatrice's lives.

She had failed her duty, leading to her being their captive. However, she had made full use of her special ability, acquired from birth, accompanying them on their current journey, thus contributing to the objectives of her former targets.

Subaru: "A pardon, I guess?"

Emilia: “Even if I were to let her free, I think everyone would oppose it. But, maybe we can find some other place to put her in outside of her gloomy imprisonment room, right?”

Subaru: “————”

Emilia: “Of course, we’ll talk to Meili herself, and see if she wants it. It’d be difficult if I got ahead of myself and ended up being hated by her.”

Hurriedly shaking her hand, Emilia insisted that it had just been one of her opinions.

Perhaps, she had put enough thought to hold and convey this story out to its fullness. Here and there, room for tweaks could be glimpsed, assuming that it would be rebutted.

——Were these Emilia’s true intentions?

Subaru: “————”

Would it be okay to believe her?

At least until now, Emilia had not been hostile towards Subaru even a single time—— no, if he were to say it, no one had shown any hostility towards Subaru. Beatrice, Echidna, Ram, Julius, Meili, none of them had shown any hostility towards Subaru.

The only certain things were that a criminal had killed Subaru by pushing him from the top of the staircase, that a criminal had slaughtered everyone in the Tower, and that a criminal had lopped off his head—— and that “Natsuki Subaru” had killed Meili.

Only these evil acts should be held in contempt.

Then, could he trust Emilia?

Could he believe in her purity, which was like that of fresh snow, that did not know of impurity?

——Emilia had put so much enthusiasm in her speech whilst he had been fretting about Meili, which his hand had killed, still he wondered if she would believe him.

Subaru: “…So stupid.”

Emilia: “Eh?”

Subaru: “I said such bullshit. I should have known. Short-tempered? Indeed. In… in these situations, can we really be talking about future prospects.”

It felt like a stalemate in all directions, he had no room to worry about anyone else.

And that especially applied to hearing the future plans for the girl who had already perished. Even if he closed his eyes pretending not to know about her death, would it really comfort him?

Subaru: “————”

Cursing, Subaru bit his lips right after he had uttered those words.

He had said such stupid things. Because of the momentum of his emotions, he could not avoid having thrust upon Emilia words that would only make her suspicious.

There was no justification for his actions. He had just been venting his anger, just like a child’s tantrum. That——

Emilia: “Subaru!”

Subaru: “Buh.”

Emilia: “What happened to you so suddenly? Even if you’re in a bad mood, it’s no good to speak like that!”

Subaru: “————”

Astonished and shocked, he hung his head down as his emotions gnawed at him, and tears started to pour out of him in sobs.

Emilia however, having anticipated such a reaction, vigorously clasped Subaru’s cheeks with both hands and looked straight into his black eyes.

Subaru: “——Ah.”

Emilia: “If you’re going to be sulky and emotional like this, speak up! Either to me or Beatrice. If Subaru’s in trouble, I’ll be in trouble together with him. But, don’t carry it all by yourself, quit moping around by yourself, stop trying to do things alone. That’s something Roswaal would do in bad times. Don’t copy him!”

Giving it her all, Emilia turned towards Subaru and continued to speak. And just after that, she took her hands away from a stunned Subaru’s face, and suddenly pulled his head over to herself.

She held Subaru’s head against her chest in an embrace and started to gently stroke it.

Emilia: “Do you understand? In my heart, I’m not mad at you at all. I won’t be disillusioned with whatever it is. So, you can tell me.”

Subaru: “————”

He was pressed against the feeling of soft, warm skin. Beyond that feeling of warmth, the rhythm of life was steadily ticking away in her.

It was quite gentle, rather like a lullaby which a baby would listen to. Subaru let out a strangled sob. In that moment, Subaru’s heart had lurched with a feeling of intense shame.

Having done all these things until now, having said such terrible things, still she was gentle towards him.

He had doubted her, he had blindly hated this poor girl, what had been the point of it all?

——Did they really exist? The one who had been planning to kill Subaru.

——Plunging to his death, had it really been a simple accident?

——It had not been something somebody had done on purpose, maybe someone had inadvertently tripped and pushed him.

There was no evil person inside this Tower.

The only one possessing a foul heart, ugly and dangerous, was Natsuki Subaru, and “Natsuki Subaru”. Properly speaking, wasn’t he just an insolent outsider to this world, someone who should have never been?

Subaru: “Emilia, I’m…”

Emilia: “——Hm?”

Subaru: “I’m…”

He did not know how to tell her.

Only, he wanted to convey it to her, to confide in her, to lay it bare.

Losing his memories, what had happened to Meili, returning back in time every time he died.

Everything he would say may not be believable. But, it was possible she would believe some of it. If she believed him, a way to break out of this deadlock may be found.

If just that were found, Subaru would——

???: “——Emilia-sama! Barusu!”

It happened at the moment he had tried to somehow squeeze his thoughts out of his shivering head.

A sharp, imminent voice came from the side, as if filling over Subaru’s anguish. Subaru could not see the owner of the voice due to Emilia’s embrace. Then, he heard Emilia above him, who confirmed that person’s identity by murmuring “Ram”.

Emilia: “What’s wrong? I’m talking to Subaru about something reaaally~ important…”

Ram: “That is, something Ram understands just by looking at it… but kindly stop it. This is an urgent matter.”

Emilia: “O-okay…”

The sound of footsteps drew closer, and as soon as they did, Emilia nervously let go of Subaru. Subaru aggressively wiped away at this face with his sleeve, getting rid of the distant feeling of warmth and the zeal in the corner of his eyes.

After that, both he and Emilia turned to face Ram.

Either for being regarded as uncool, or whether her timing was the worst, he wanted to strike Ram with the swell of emotions brewing in his mind.

Even though he just reflected on it, he felt resentful for himself for not being able to stand straight again immediately.

However, Ram's appearance transmitted that she could not afford to do things such as teasing them for them embracing one another, or such as considering Subaru's mixed emotions, after seeing them.

Emilia: "Ram, what's wrong?"

Ram: "…It is an urgent matter. Please come to the Third Floor Library immediately. Beatrice-sama found something terrible."

Emilia: "Beatrice did?"

To the surprised Emilia, Ram briefly nodded as affirmation. Then, as she turned away from Subaru and Emilia,

Ram: "Anastasia-sama… No, was it Echidna? Anyway, Ram will go search for her and Julius. Barusu, you go with Emilia-sama."

Subaru: "Y-yeah, got it…"

Subaru nodded his head whilst being unable to form a reply to her forceful attitude.

Without even waiting for an answer, Ram kicked the door and sprinted away from the two. Surprised from the situation, Subaru turned to Emilia.

Subaru: "Um, Ram, said that…"

Emilia: "——Let's hurry. Ram sounded very serious. Something terrible must have happened."

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "Subaru, I won't forget about what we talked earlier."

Subaru: "…Yeah."

Subaru listened to Emilia and nodded feebly, her being the only one thinking about that.

Already, from his guilt towards Meili, to his sense of urgency regarding the situation, all of Subaru's plan to tackle it on his own had been torn down.

With that, Subaru took off with Emilia, heading for the Third Floor Taygeta at a brisk pace.

Welcoming them after running up the long staircase, was the Library of the Dead boasting a huge collection of books.

???: "——So you've come, I suppose."

Beatrice, standing in front of the stairs behind the bookshelves holding the countless Books of The Dead, welcomed Subaru.

The girl, with her short arms, and a peculiar pattern in her eyes, breathed out a tired sigh with a frown.

Emilia: "Beatrice, Ram told us to come. You have found something terrible, is what she said."

Beatrice: "Certainly, it cannot be said that it's good news, in fact. Rather, it's something bad, I suppose."

Saying that, Beatrice swung her head to Emilia's question. Then, she turns her blue eyes towards Subaru,

Beatrice: "Betty was looking into the Library of Taygeta since this morning, in fact. While Subaru was out cold, Betty was trying to analyze this room, though its mechanisms are nothing like the Forbidden Library's, I suppose."

Subaru: "Well, regardless of the introduction. What happened? Please tell."

Subaru, panting lightly having ran up the stairs, urged her to get to the point.

Hearing those words, Beatrice shut her eyes for a moment. And, slowly, she pointed towards one of the bookshelves, one that was diagonally behind her,

Beatrice: "The third row from the top, the Book on the far right."

Subaru: “——The third row.”

Emilia: “——On the far right.”

In accordance with what Beatrice had pointed out, Subaru and Emilia came to the bookshelf, repeating her words.

The bookshelf was packed with books, the characters written on the spine illegible to Subaru, being from a different world. As usual, he could only think of them as hieroglyphs.

So, even the title of the book which Beatrice wished to point out to Subaru and the others, was not known to him.

At least as long as it came from this Library, it was certain that it was a Book of The Dead——

Emilia: “No way…”

Emilia, who had been standing right next to him, spilled these words out.

Looking at that, Subaru’s cheeks stiffened at hearing her stunned reaction.

Such astonishment had delayed the sadness which was to come straight after. Just, what was it that had punched her heart with such force?

Shivering, her lips trembled right next to Subaru, clearly in shock.

And so, Emilia spoke.

Emilia: “——Meili Portroute.”

Arc 6 Chapter 46 – Meili Portroute

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 4 “Meili Portroute”, Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (GracedHarperd, Ice/Ice_Occultism, PaperLightning, Ringo) — Complete

——Meili Portroute.

Staring at the binding of the Book, as Emilia muttered that, Subaru became shocked. His eyes shot open, he glared at the binding of the Book. The letters written there, Subaru could not read them at all.

However, here now, was is no reason for Subaru to put on a pretext and think that Emilia was shaking without meaning.

As for the Book before his eyes—— the Book of the Dead’s title, why was it Meili’s name? There was no room to doubt this fact.

Subaru: “————”

He still was unable to speak; with stiff cheeks, Subaru had his back break out in a cold sweat.

Inside his skull, his brain was desperately screaming one thing and one thing only—— “Why”.

*Why is there a Book with Meili’s name here? Why did this Library that kept records of the dead have the girl’s book ready that quickly? Why is it that in a Library this vast they found Meili’s book so easily? Why is it this had to happen the moment Subaru felt like he could trust Emilia out of everyone in the Tower? Why was it that fate just can’t forgive Natsuki Subaru? Why why why why why why why why why why whywhywhywhywhywhywhyhywhywhywhywhyw

Emilia: "——Beatrice, did you check the contents of the Book?"

Subaru: "——Hk."

While his head was filled with copious amount of "Why", those words rung awfully clearly inside his eardrums. With Beatrice being probed by Emilia, he raised his face in a snap.

She asked Beatrice while continuing to lay against the bookshelf, glaring at the book in question.

As far as Subaru had heard about the Books of the Dead found in this Library, if one were acquainted with the person in the Book and touched it, then the memories of their life would pour into their head.

Though it was a magical book with quite the chilling ability, it was not the fantasy-tone part of the story that would become a problem in this place, it was a more realistic one.

Looking at the records of Meili's life meant that they would supposedly see the records of her last moments.

In other words, they would see who it was that strangled her.

Subaru: "————"

Situationally speaking, Subaru had killed Meili with his own two hands, but he did not doubt that "Natsuki Subaru" had been the one to carry it out.

But, only Subaru could come to that distinction. The memories acted somewhat like video footage, such as the footage one could get from crime prevention cameras around potential crime scenes. He won't be able to expect them to follow such a distinction. In addition, in this loop, Subaru had concealed his memory loss from Emilia and the others.

Subaru's crime would become clear to them from the memories, and once that point was reached, he would have to reveal his memory. Such ad-hoc behavior would only sound like a bad excuse, were someone else to do it.

Naturally, Emilia and the others would think the same as Subaru.

But if Beatrice had anticipated this, and had already referred to the memory about Meili's death——

Beatrice: “—I haven’t checked yet, I suppose.”

Subaru: “—Hk, oh, is that so?”

Beatrice: “It’s natural that I didn’t, in fact. I have no choice but to handle it carefully, I suppose. To begin with, I don’t even know whether this Meili’s Book is about the one we know, in fact. If it really is that girl’s Book…”

Emilia: “Meili’s inside this Tower… Oh no! We have to look for her right away!”

Her complexion changing, Emilia tried to break off into a run at hearing Beatrice’s words. However, Beatrice interrupted Emilia with a shake of her head.

Beatrice: “Wait, I suppose! If it really is that girl’s Book, then searching for her all in a hurry is meaningless, in fact. You know the meaning of a Book being added here, I suppose.”

Emilia: “…So because of that, Ram went searching for us and Julius’s group.”

Beatrice: “If in the middle of this, Meili waltzes in looking all innocent, then you can take this as being Betty’s childish misunderstanding, in fact.”

Emilia’s momentum steadily drained out of her as she listened to Beatrice calmly pointing these facts out. Still, with a fretful look across her pale face, Emilia clasped her hands against her chest, as if a prayer.

She hoped that the Book from the bookshelf was not Meili’s, clinging onto the hope that it belonged to someone who had happened to have the same name.

——However, Natsuki Subaru knew that hope was ephemeral.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru was frantically turning his head back and forth between Emilia and Beatrice as they spoke.

His thoughts were spinning around in circles; for the most part, he was thinking on how to get out of this situation, and whether he should keep the truth only to himself.

As he had simulated before, he could not allow Emilia and the others to witness Meili's memories. It was a stroke of good luck that Beatrice had not seen them, but even so, it was only a matter of time until one of them would.

It was fact that Meili was dead, she would never appear in this Library again with her nonchalant look. So of course, they would eventually get a chance to check the Book of the Dead. Before long they would do it.

If they looked into the Book, Emilia and the others would accuse Subaru.

Then, should he do something like disposing of Meili's Book? ——No, he wished to avoid that.

It was true that this situation was exceedingly difficult, however what was more problematic were Subaru's feelings—— Subaru also had a great interest in the contents of the Book.

Currently, Subaru believed with certainty, that "Natsuki Subaru" had been the one that had murdered Meili. If he were to look through Meili's records, he may be able to see "Natsuki Subaru" there.

He could conceivably look at the literal form of the potential "enemy" lying inside him. Subaru's situation would change drastically, if such a thing were possible. At least, he should be able to come up with a resolution.

Hence, he was unable to allow Emilia or anyone else read the contents of the Book. Subaru must be the only one to experience the Book's contents——

???: "Someone called me because of a commotion, did something happen?"

Emilia: "Ah, Shaula, you're here."

In the meanwhile, Shaula had showed up at the Library of Taygeta.

Craning her neck, her black hair swinging about, Shaula was greeted by Emilia and Beatrice, then noticing Subaru at the back of the Library and waving her hand at him.

In this moment, he thought her appearance overlapped with how Meili had entered the breakfast room this morning, and so Subaru turned his face away and resisted the urge to vomit.

Shaula: “Oyo, what a cold response from Master! After spending such a passionate time together with meee~.”

Beatrice: “I’m quite interested in what happened between you and Subaru, but for now I’ll postpone it, I suppose. Speak up if you’ve seen Meili anywhere, in fact. You were good friends with her, I suppose.”

Shaula: “The ankle-biter… hmm, Number Two[159]? Her? Hmm, now that you mention it, I haven’t seen her for a while. I don’t know what happened to her after this morning’s breakfast.”

Shaula answered Beatrice’s question by shaking both of her hands. Then, she placed her waving hands against her cheeks, and cocking her head she said, “What’s wrong with Number Two?”.

At hearing Shaula’s question, Emilia cast her gaze down in unease,

Emilia: “To tell you the truth, we found a Book with Meili’s name in the Library. We haven’t looked inside yet, before doing that we wanted to check whether she was okay…”

Shaula: “Ah, I see. Number Two ended up dying? That’s troublesome to think about, there are many ways you can die; things like that may just happen, nooo~?”

Emilia: “—Hk.”

Beatrice: “…You.”

Looking quite indifferent to what was going on around her, Shaula stated her opinion on the matters of life and death, paying zero consideration towards the distressed Emilia.

Hearing what Shaula had said, Emilia’s cheeks stiffened, and Beatrice glared at Shaula with an expression of anger. However, Shaula did not pay any attention to how the two had reacted,

Shaula: “So, where is this important boook? Once you look inside, you may find out how and where Number Two died, indeeed.”

Subaru: “That’s, that’s enough from you! Always talking like this…”

[159] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: “She calls her by the term «chibiko» (ちびっ子), meaning «small child».”

Subaru was unable to look on without doing anything, and so he flared up at Shaula's reckless remarks. Now Shaula's behavior showed heartlessness too.

Up until now, by no means could Subaru tell Emilia his thoughts, he had just about enough discretion to not open his mouth. As for Shaula, she had no——

Shaula: "Don't get maaad, Master. I didn't mean any offense! But, but, practically, the Book is here, so shouldn't we do that?"

Subaru: "At… least, after we all get together…"

Shaula: "Even if you don't do it leisurely, isn't reading the Book worth a shot? If it's about Number One's worries of not knowing what'll happen after reading it, then…"

Subaru faltered, the strength of his rebuttal weakening as Shaula pressed him for an answer. She cut off her speech and quietly sent Beatrice a sidelong glance, and then once again she cast her gaze at Subaru.

Her face continued to have an unreserved, but non-malicious look on it.

Shaula: "——Master should read the Book."

Subaru: "————"

Shaula: "Master and that other pretty boy[160] have already have their first experience when you first found this Library, no? Afterwards, there were no negative effects, riiiight…?"

Her ample-sized breasts swaying, Shaula took a step forward and brought her face right next to his. His breath was taken away by the woman's suggestion, and Subaru's brain once again began mulling it over carefully.

Shaula's suggestion was extremely reasonable for a woman with such an attitude.

[160] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "She uses «イキャメン», read as «Ikemen», another way to say pretty boy/metrosexual".

Naturally, it was unknown to him what sort of effect the Books of the Dead had on people after having read them. At least, there had been two people who had already experienced it. There should be enough value in trying to read it.

Of course, it was entirely possible that this experience of Subaru's had snatched away his memories, triggering the separation between "Natsuki Subaru" and his current self. If that really was the case here, it would be odd that Julius had not experienced any of these unusual phenomena. By no means would he conceal his memory loss like Subaru had done; it was a great leap of imagination to come to such a suspicion.

There was no relation between the influence of the Books of the Dead and his loss of memories.

Making this conclusion was no issue at all in this situation. Thus, with that being the case, her suggestion had come as a lifesaver——

Subaru: "——Certainly, what Shaula said may have a grain of truth in it."

Beatrice: "…Subaru, are you really going to do it, in fact? Up until this time you shared meals with that companion, I suppose."

If he were to take advantage of Shaula's words, for the time being, he could break through the first obstacle.

Being the first one to read Meili's Book of the Dead, and making sure he was the last and only one to read it, then what Subaru had done would remain hidden inside his mind. However, that was where Beatrice's genuine worry for him entered into the fold.

She was concerned about Subaru's spirit being damaged.

Until now, the dead that "Natsuki Subaru" had seen here were people he had only a shallow relationship with. There was a big difference between that and Meili.

They had journeyed together, they had talked to each other, they had eaten their meals together; she was that kind of comrade in arms.

Beatrice was concerned about what sort of mental trauma would befall Subaru if he were to see her Death with his own eyes.

Subaru: “…I’ll be fine, don’t worry. As Shaula said, I’m the best person to do it, most likely.”

To Beatrice’s concerns, Subaru straightened his cheeks so that he looked serious, and nodded.

Certainly, looking at the memories of a deceased person whose face one knew could very likely cause someone to have mental trauma or abnormalities. It might have been unbearable to a decent person.

——But that was not the case with him. It was not so.

For Subaru now, the journey with Meili, the words he had exchanged with her, the meals eaten alongside her, by no means was she that kind of comrade in arms to him.

For these few hours, he had behaved as if was acquainted with her. They had shared two or three meals together, and sometimes she given him reassurance, helping him a bit, but that was the extent of their relations.

She was just an unfamiliar little girl to him—— he would not receive any mental trauma by seeing her death.

Emilia: “I’m still against this. If we really, really have to, then it shouldn’t be Subaru, but me…”

Beatrice: “If Emilia wants to look at it, Betty will oppose it, in fact. If someone must look at it… it’s frustrating, but Julius or Subaru are our safest bets, I suppose. But, if you had seen how Julius looked like this morning, you’d probably want to erase him from the list of candidates here, in fact.”

Emilia: “Beatrice…”

Emilia, who looked quite dispirited, trailed off into silence at hearing Beatrice’s reasoning.

At least, Beatrice seemed to have chosen to respect Subaru’s will. However, due to what had happened just before, Emilia knew that Subaru’s condition was quite unstable.

Therefore, Subaru shook his head vertically at Emilia, whose amethyst eyes showed deep concern that would not disappear.

Subaru: “——I will look. Perhaps it’s only a misunderstanding, and if you read it in high spirits then maybe nothing will happen?”

Emilia: “…If anything happens, I’ll tear the Book from you at once. I’ll pull your hair as well…”

Subaru: “I’d prefer much more if you’d call out to me and shake my shoulders instead.”

With Emilia’s superhuman strength, if she were to pull his hair, the back of Subaru’s head would become a permanent desolate wasteland. And then, after retorting with such light-hearted words, Subaru faced the bookshelf.

Unchanging, Meili’s Book remained there, emitting a strange presence. To start with, at the times he had happened to catch a glimpse of it, he had seen it as just an ordinary plain book. But now, from this strange aura the Book had, it felt as if he could instinctually recognize the name. At any rate, he could not rely on just his senses.

Thus, Subaru picked up the Book to search into what he could not rely on in himself.

Subaru: “————”

Behind him, Emilia and Beatrice were holding their breaths. Shaula had her hands behind her head, watching over Subaru’s decision with a carefree expression.

While taking a look at these three individuals, Subaru took a deep breath, and he placed his hand on the front cover of the thick Book, which looked rather like a dictionary.

Subaru: “——Let’s go.”

As if trying to persuade himself to do it, Subaru muttered this and opened the Book—— his consciousness went dark.

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——Ever since the woman had been aware of what was around her, there had been nothing.

There had been no one around.

There were no men, women, adults, children, elders, babies, no one at all.

Alone in the dark, dark, black, black forest, the woman was all alone.

Being able to stand up and walk. Being able to speak. Being able to cry out in order to live.

The woman was not able to do any of these things; all of these things were far away, unknown to the woman, vanished beyond oblivion.

???: "————"

If she did not how to speak, she could not know how to mourn.

If she did not know how to walk, she could not know how to resist.

If she did not know how to live, then there was no reason for her to know about dying.

Therefore, the woman had no choice but to be snatched away by the fangs of a beast, the meaning of both life and death not being not brought to this woman.

The beast had a horn on its forehead, and this hideous vicious beast of slaughter was continuously engaged in ferocious slaughter——

The woman did not know why this beast had not crushed her throat with its fangs, and had instead dragged her by the nape of her clothing back to its lair.

However, choices, which were not supposed to exist, were born, and the woman's fate was decided under the beasts.

She did not know any words, so she did not know how to mourn.

She did not know how to walk, so she did not know how to resist.

However, as she knew a way of living, she did not believe she would die.

Before she knew it, the woman had followed the murderous beasts and become their queen, and had dominated the entire region.

Assailing their prey whenever she wanted, eating whenever she felt hungry, killing whenever she felt like it, sleeping whenever she wanted to sleep, living the way she wanted to, killing the way she wanted to, she was raised amongst the motherhood of slaughter.

In the past, she had lost the memory for the reason for her existence.

She had been reduced to something like nothing, something that had no need for anything like a symbol, that sort of stuff.

At this rate, she believed that for better or worse, she would die alone, as one of these beasts.

???: "——This welcome is far warmer than what I thought it would be. However, I do not mean to hurt you."

It was a girl in black. Covered with a blood-reeking devilishness, it was a girl in black.

With a mere action of her hand, the woman who led the group of beasts was deprived of everything she had, by that girl in black.

Blood and flesh overflowed, dying throes scorched the sky, and the smile of the girl in black began to be coated in their jets of blood.

Without knowing how to do anything, the woman, once again, was in a position where she had nothing.

Girl: "I've been told to take you back with me. That's why, I shall have you accompany me."

The girl in black forcefully took the woman who had nothing.

She took away the place where she had lived for a long time, the beasts she had spent so long with, the place where she had been herself.

Even after all that, the woman still could not do anything.

She did not know any words, so she did not know to mourn.

――エルザ・グランヒルテは、
とんでもない女だったと思う。
「――連れ帰れと言われているの。
だから、一緒にきてもらうわ」
初めての出会いは最悪だった。

She did not know how to walk, so she did not know how to resist.

She had lost the way of survival, so this time she may have no choice but to die.

???: “How to mourn, how to resist, how to live, you lost all of those? No way, no way, I couldn’t care less for however many dull excuses you come up with.”

That made her regret of not knowing how to mourn.

???: “Mourn, for this lovely lady’s sake. Resist, for this lovely lady’s sake. Live, for the sake of loving this lovely lady.”

That made her regret of not knowing how to resist.

???: “If you’re saying that you’ve lost everything, forgotten everything, parted with everything, then this lovely lady will just have to discipline you, won’t I? ——That’s a «Mother’s» duty, after all.”

——That made her regret forgetting how to live, and her inability to think about how to die.

More hellish than hell, more nightmarish than nightmares, more evil than evil——

As for that, Mother gave all sorts of discipline, not for the sake of the woman, but for the sake of herself.

Mother did not lie.

Mother was impartial. Mother used every possible means to be loved.

Mother, however, just used distorted version of those means.

She remembered words. How to mourn got peeled away.

She remembered how to walk. How to resist was painted away.

She remembered how to live. It was etched into her, so that there would be no more hope to be had of a way of dying.

Girl: “Please stop being under the complete control of that person. Because, besides me, surely, no matter how many lives one gets, they would end up being insufficient.”

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Norvak (source)

Suddenly, once she had remembered the way of words, and the way of walking, and the way of living, she had met again the girl in black.

The girl in black had often shown her face to the woman. Before she even noticed, she was acting in accompaniment of the girl in black much more than before.

She remembered when she was thrown into warm water before meeting Mother for the first time.

Covered in blood, mud, and dirt, the merciless girl in black had sloppily rinsed her of the irremovable dirt. Or perhaps, that had been the last sense of freedom the woman had felt.

Mother's intention made it clear that she wanted the woman to be aligned with the girl in black.

The girl in black was abnormally strong. Her way of killing was excellent. She knew more on how to kill rather than on how to live. Everything else except for that was estranged in her.

???: "■■■■ is here. Well, it's better to leave it to you."

A single event would shape everything else that had happened, or that's how it felt like.

She was undisciplined. She was not strict. She was quite a handful as a companion. She could not take her eyes off her companion. She was not faithful to Mother. Not just in how she killed, but also in how she lived, there was freedom therein.

She had seen hell. She had seen nightmares. She had seen evil.

For her whole life, the woman thought she would never forget the Horror.

While she was together with the girl in black, while she went along and helped this undisciplined girl, it felt like what was engraved in her would fade away. But——

Woman: "——Elsa, died."

Died. She had died. She had turned to ashes and died.

The girl in black who would never die even when she was killed—— no, towards the end, that girl was Elsa.

Died. She had died. She had turned to ashes and died.

She had had a spear stuck into her belly, she had lost both of her arms from her shoulders, and she had also saw her with a broken neck.

Still Elsa did not die. She thought she would never die.

Died. She had died. She had turned to ashes and died.

She had also endured Mother's training. She had also endured the hell, and the nightmares and the Horror.

But, Elsa had died. She was going to go back being alone. She had lost her herd; she had lost Elsa. She was all alone.

Died. She had died. She had turned to ashes and died.

Killed. She had been killed. She had been turned to ashes and killed.

Those who had turned Elsa to ashes, had captured the woman and imprisoned her.

——Alone, inside a dark room, the woman questioned the void around her.

Hate, hateful, hatred? The feeling of Hatred, what does it feel like?

Sad, sadness, sorrow? The feeling of Sorrow, what does it feel like?

She did not know how to mourn. She did not know how to resist. Even for herself, she did not know the value of life.

It was like this from the beginning.

Before Elsa had died, before she could recognize that the girl in black was Elsa, before meeting Mother, before beginning her training, before her herd of beasts had been destroyed by the girl in black, before she had begun to lead the herd of beasts, before her life was saved by the whim of a beast, ever since the time she had been torn away from those who were supposed to be her real mother and father, the woman had been a defective product.

The woman was set adrift, living.

When she had been a beast, she had imitated the way of living of a beast. After being trained by Mother, she had done exactly what she told her to do. And even after she started to spend time together with Elsa, she had imitated the way she spoke, she had imitated her, imitated.

From the beginning, this woman had been that kind of creature.

A humanoid creature that imitated people. She had behaved as others desired.

The woman was capable of imitating others, she was a mere sham of the people she imitated, she had the form of a person but was nothing like a person——

Kill the bastard, she wondered if that was what she was thinking. *Pursue him*, she wondered if she was thinking of that in that manner.

She wanted to imitate someone who had murdered Elsa, she wanted to precisely know what to do in regards to Elsa's death. She wanted to imitate. She wanted to see what was the correct norm.

What should she do? She had lost Elsa—— who should the woman imitate now?

Time passed and still she did not understand.

Meanwhile, while keeping up her appearances on the outside, the woman was a woman who continued to exist for the desires of those in her surroundings.

She wished for change. If the events changed, if her situation changed, she may come to an answer. That, or Mother may want her to die—— that also may be okay.

She had let herself be shaped up as requested, as they desired, as if she was adrift. Then, if Mother desired it, she could also take her life in which she could not find any particular value in.

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――――――――――――――

――――――――――――――――――She hated it.

She hated ending it right there, ending here, she hated it.

A feeling of impatience burned her heart. Her desiring soul, demanded her own desires.

At the very least she wanted to know the answer. The answer to what she should do, now that Elsa had been murdered, would do.

???: "――Oh, so you came here too, ■■■■[161]?"

At night.

In the Library inside the Tower of Sand, in the place where the Books of the Dead were, a voice came from behind her.

Behind her, there stood a familiar black-haired boy who she knew well.

Her heart jumped in that instant. She noticed it herself, deep down, that she was afraid. If he were to ask why she was there, she could not answer questions such as whose Book she herself was searching for her to have come here secretly?

Boy: "I just kinda had a Book I wanted to look for. I really should've asked the others for help though, I couldn't stand the feelings of restlessness and…"

The boy was saying something.

With a smile and a head tilt, she hid her exalted heartbeat. Pretending as always.

Boy: "――Don't stay up too late, ■■■■."

[161] Each of the blocks is hiding one Japanese character. This is the most consistent (and less spoilery) way to approach this issue, sadly.

As she was told that, she left the Library. Slowly walking away, then quickening her pace, and in the end, running.

He saw what she had been doing, he knew what she had been doing, he realized what she had been doing.

Biting her nails and furrowing her brow, the woman squatted and calmed her breathing. She did not wish to be seen, she did not wish for it to be known, she did not wish to be noticed.

But she had abandoned everything.

The woman understood why it was that she had come all the way to this place.

And it was all the more reason to change everything she knew and start all over again, abandoning anything and everything.

The urge controlled her head. As her repressed emotions were left to grind on her molars, the woman turned around.

Going back through the road she had just ran through. Her legs gradually relaxed, and she eventually initiated a slow walk. Finally walking so gently so as to eliminate the sound of her footsteps, she returned to the Library where the Books of the Dead were.

With his back facing her way, the black-haired boy was sitting on the ground.

With how many Books scattered around the ground, had he already found the Book of The Dead he was looking for? Already guessing that, she felt jealous. But before he notices her, she definitely has to——

Boy: "——You're so damn shallow."

Letting herself be controlled by feelings of desperation, she felt like blaming her impulsive actions.

As she stopped her feet, all there was before her eyes was the black hair on the back of the boy's unturned head.

She was supposed to have come back without making a sound, having held her breath.

It was true that she did not hold a candle to Elsa, but even then, the woman could at least erase the sound of her footsteps.

Then how had he found out?

Woman: "————"

All of her thoughts became jumbled. She had just come here while eliminating the sound of her footsteps, and he had still seen through her with his back to her, what kind of explanation could she give now.

——No, even then, she should have said something. There was still her training. It would have been fine if she had just come here. No matter what, the woman had been brought along by the boy. She was also supposed to take that into consideration.

With a timid smile and a head tilt, she hid her exalted heartbeat. Pretending as alwa——

Boy: "Don't try to suck up to me, it's disgusting. Nobody would want you doing that to them."

He cut off her train of thought and shut her up.

She pondered, her thoughts whirling around. What did the black-haired boy mean?

Boy: "Don't give me that composed face, submissive little doll. Are you going to ignore that desire in the depths of your own heart?"

Desire was in the depths of her heart.

Why did hearing him point that out weigh on her so awfully heavily?

Boy: "Devote yourself to listening to your desire. If you do so, you'll see yourself a little more. And when you see yourself a little more, you'll know what you want to do."

She wanted to know what she wanted to do. To see herself.

What she wanted to do, what she desired, that was——

Boy: "——Now that's a nice face. Looks rich."

When she noticed, the black-haired boy had turned around and was standing right before the woman. The boy's hand grabbed onto one of the woman's hanging braids, and stared at her with horrible eyes that held a perverted pleasure.

She was unable to take her eyes off of those dark pupils in front of her.

Boy: "If you understand your desire and begin to see who you really are, then you'll begin to act more like yourself. Your boring worries and anguish, I'll make sure to remember them."

Selfishly deciding what another person wished for, the boy declared so while putting the tips of the woman's hair to his lips.

This filled her chest with a feeling of dread, however, a slight pain burned in her chest.

Boy: "——I'll make sure to remember them."

If she understood her own desires.

If she properly came to see who she really was.

Could the woman become more like herself, like what ■■■■■ was supposed to be?

Woman: "——I wooonder~, just how seriously should I take what we talked about last night?"

The sun had risen, she had finished her breakfast, and before they moved to the next Examination in the Tower, she contacted the black-haired boy.

She had thought about it so much she could not sleep. She thought, thought, thought, but no matter what, she could not arrive to an answer.

The boy greeted the woman in the morning almost like his attitude last night had never happened or something.

So she had to make a special chance, she called out to him. Unable to control her restless feelings, at the very least she needed to get him to a place where no one else could hear them, then it might be better.

Boy: “Not here. Let’s change places.”

That suggestion came from the boy.

They changed places. As they entered the room, she wanted to question him about the meaning of his words from the previous night—— come to think of it, in the Library last night, the boy had said something about intending to talk with everybody else.

Boy: “Sorry, ■■■■.”

As those words were whispered into her ear, her light body was pushed down into the floor.

Falling down. She hit her back on the floor, yet was unable to scream. Just as her field of vision was flickering like that, she saw the face of the boy getting on top of her—— the smirk on his face was the most disgustingly fiendish thing she had ever seen.

Boy: “Asking that directly is against the rules.”

Her neck was gripped with a strong force.

Her mouth was opening and closing, yet none of the air that was so important for her body was arriving. Writhing. Struggling. She grabbed the hand on her neck and dug her nails in. Desperately, she kicked her legs.

She could not move nor push him off. Butn if she were Elsa, she could deal with him.

Boy: “This time it was a loss because of a rule break, but I hope you’ll act even bolder next time. Do your best as you always have.”

She did not understand what he meant.

What was he talking about? What was he saying? What was he telling her?

Boy: “My oh my, this is going to be very interesting—— the Natsuki Subaru murder mystery.”

I’m being killed. My understanding can only reach so far. I’m going to be killed. In the end could I do anything at all? Killed. When I was hunting in that forest, what did I do? Killed. Meaninglessly unable to

do anything. Being killed. It was fun. Killed. It was enjoyable. Be killed. Like I was part of some childish game. Being killed. Killed. Killed. Killed. Killed. Killed. Killed.

——I'll kill you.

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Subaru: "Uh, AAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!?"

In an instant, his head jumped back as if being flicked away, and ■■■ fell backwards.

What was being held in his hands was dropped, he saw the world go around in circles. He took a pained breath. His lungs were having panicked spasms at his labored breathing.

???: "Hey, Subaru!?"

As he was remembering the painful shock, the silver-haired girl rushed over to ■■■, screaming in pain. She was followed by a girl with light-colored hair. Both came and propped him up at the same time.

Subaru: "*I*-I am… Ah. Eh? I? W-w-w-w-what just. How, wha, eh?[162]"

???: "Deep breaths! Take deep breaths, in fact! You don't need to force yourself to talk, I suppose! Emilia, do not touch that Book under any circumstances, in fact!"

His eyes were going in circles and foam was sprouting from the corners of ■■■'s mouth, as the girl—— correction, Beatrice, desperately called out to him. Beatrice called out to the silver-haired girl—— Emilia, who was reaching for the Book. Yes, Emilia once again nodded and retracted her hand away after all.

Emilia: "But Beatrice, Subaru's looking weird! This Book is…"

[162] Translation note by Witch Cult Translation: "He starts off referring to himself similar to how Meili would, using «わたし» (watashi), and then switches over to his usual «俺» (ore) to refer to himself."

Beatrice “That’s exactly the reason why, it would be troublesome if Emilia were to fall into the same condition, I suppose! It’s probably quite likely that he ended up diving in too deep, in fact. He’s confusing how he talks, I suppose.”

At Beatrice’s analysis, Emilia’s cheeks stiffened and she gulped. Following that, she swiftly came to ■■■’s side and held on to his cheek, meeting his eyes with her own pupils.

Emilia: “Subaru, remember. You’re ok, you’re Natsuki Subaru, my Knight. You’re clueless about the world and broke beyond compare, you get along with everybody and… you’re. You’re…”

Emilia started picking through her memories, hysterically bringing up everything she could.

While hearing her say all of that, ■■■ began to. ■■ru began to. Su■ru began to,

——Subaru began to recall himself.

Subaru: “I-I… Ah, Emilia, Beatrice… I am, me, right[163]? *I*’m not her, I am… without Elsa, err…”

Emilia: “You’re doing fine, stay calm. Everything’s fine… slowly. Slowly, okay?”

Beatrice: “Like a splinter, slowly pull out those lodged memories, in fact. And then, you’ll be able to come back to the normal Subaru, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Ugh, hk…”

Emilia and Beatrice, talked to Subaru—— Yes, Subaru. They talked to Subaru.

While those words were reaching his ears, somehow, he sorted through all he had seen just now.

Sorting through them. Doing it somehow. Down to the very end. The memories. The moment his life was extinguished.

???: “Emilia-sama, apologies for making you wait. I heard about it from Miss Ram on the way——”

[163] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Here he does not use «watashi», instead using «ore», such as saying that «I am me (ore), right?» (俺は、俺、だよな？).”

“Anastasia”: “Is it true that you found a Book with that girl’s name?”

Then, Julius who was running up the stairs arrived.

Julius and Echidna arrived, then Ram, being at the end of the group, caught up; the name of the absent Meili was mentioned. To those three people, Emilia and Beatrice started explaining the current situation.

Shaula: “————”

Shaula was silently staring, at a Book lying at her feet, to which she was indifferent.

She narrowed her black eyes. There was not a single hint of emotion in that stare. She was simply, silent.

——Silently staring towards it.

Arc 6 Chapter 47 – *I* Won't Forgive You[164]

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 5 "Murder Is a Habit", Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

A dark, dark, dark, dark, dark, dark, dark place.

In the back of his head, the back, back, back, back, back, back, back.

Myself, I, *I*, who, you, *you*, Natsuki Subaru, Meili Portroute.

Natsuki Kenichi, Elsa Granhiert, Natsuki Naoko, Petra Leyte, Emilia, Shaula, Beatrice, Frederica Baumann, Anastasia Hoshin, Garfiel Tinzel, Julius Juukulius, Otto Suwen, Ram, the blue hair, who is, I am, you are, "*I*" *am*, myself is, the others are, I, you, *you*, *me*——

—Myself, "*I*", Natsuki Subaru. Myself, "*I*", Natsuki Subaru.

—Who, "*I*", Meili Portroute. Who, "*I*", Meili Portroute.

Subaru: "————"

These thoughts spun round and round and round in his mind, blurring the lines between what was reality and what was not. They were fused together as one, blending as one, becoming entwined as one, feeling affection as one, hating as one, suffering as one, loving as one, desiring as one, killing as one, wishing

[164] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Not to detract from the reading experience, but there are some important nuances in this chapter you must be aware of, which are difficult to convert to English. As you have read in the previous Chapter, reading Meili's Book caused Subaru to sort of take in her personality. She has a distinct style of speaking, using «わたし» (watashi) to refer to herself, whereas Subaru uses «俺» (ore). The way chosen to represent this was the use of italics whenever Meili interjects in his thoughts. So, any passages in italics should correspond to Meili's voice inside Subaru's head. This extends to the title, which uses Meili's pronoun. In addition, the quotation marks used for the self-referencing word (I/myself/my/etc.) were preserved."

as one, destroying as one, threatening as one, understanding as one, crying as one, laughing as one, not understanding as one.

You can only be yourself. Others can only be themselves.

There was no room for compromise, no compromise out of pity, no chance to engender a compromise, no being considerate to each other, there was nothing, nothing at all in the end.

Emilia: "Subaru…"

Subaru: "————"

Shaking his head back and forth, he exerted himself in trying to extract the thorn of the so-called "other person" from his own inside with utmost effort.

Emilia and Beatrice both gently hoisted him up by his shoulders, and prop the struggling boy up from his left and right. Whilst feeling traces of the two's worries on their cheeks, the boy—— the individual who should be called Natsuki Subaru was attempting to determine the boundary between his own self and others. He was struggling in his attempt to regain himself.

A swirl of thoughts clouded him, the correct answer disappeared due to the whirl of emotions melting together inside him.

His lungs were convulsing; if he were to feel his throat now, he would realize that his breathing had become painful. From within his neck, he was experiencing a severe sense of pressure; a fear that he would suffocate was slowly assaulting him.

The sensation of impending Death once again revived within him, the feeling of wanting to vomit surfaced inside him and caused warm tears to stream out of his eyes.

Subaru: "————"

While confronted by this horrible feeling, Subaru slowly and carefully tried to exclude that which would not define him from within him, struggling to establish his own personal identity.

First person pronouns, second person pronouns, memory, recollections, impressions, feelings, identifying that which belonged to the other person, and distinguishing between them.

Just like that, if he sifted through what was not his and removed the stuff that had gotten blended together, he would go back to as he was.

Otherwise, this state, in which they were fused and blended together, would never peel off.

It was himself, and the little girl who had been killed by his own "hands" that were mixed together into a hodgepodge of——

???: "——Natsuki-kun, what the heck did you see? Are you able to tell us?"

Subaru: "Uh, ah?"

During his immersion into his current identity crisis, a voice had called out from in front of Subaru.

He looked towards it. Right in front of him, at the same level he was crouched at, a person with pale, turquoise eyes was squinting at him, Anastasia—— no, was it Echidna now? In any case, it was that girl.

Despite Subaru having such recognition, Echidna's eyes remained quite serious, and she continued to speak.

"Anastasia": "I sympathize that you are in a tough spot. But, the current situation we are all in is quite grave. If you are able to, we need information as soon as possible. That way we do not make any mistakes when dealing with this."

Emilia: "Wait, Echidna. Just now, Subaru experienced something terrible…"

"Anastasia": "Of course, I know that. I also appreciate that his recklessness was something he did for us, you know. That is why we ought to have a duty in responding quickly to his judgement."

Subaru could only let out a hoarse breath, as Echidna's assertions pierced through Emilia's attempt to defend him.

Whilst talking, Echidna's gaze for a moment turned towards the fallen Book on the floor behind him. Taking a look at the thick black binding of the Book, Echidna continued her speech with a "Because",

"Anastasia": "The little girl who accompanied us is missing. Furthermore, a Book which seems to match with the little girl's name was found in this Library which records the memories of the dead… This situation is serious. We cannot afford to be treading water here."

Emilia: "That's… Yeah, but…"

Emilia was incapable of finding a rebuttal against Echidna's low, insisting tone of voice.

In fact, Echidna's complaint was justified.

In this messed-up situation, the only one to possess vital information was Subaru. Taking everyone's feelings into consideration, it could be said that everyone here had no time to spare to calm down.

As she knew that, Echidna was prepared to be blamed, so with a steeled heart, she raised her questions at Subaru.

At hearing her resolve, Subaru grit his teeth again and placed his hand against his throat.

With all his strength, fighting against the feeling that he could not breathe, he shut his eyes. And——

"Anastasia": "Let me try asking again, Natsuki-kun. What did you see inside the bo——"

Subaru: "——I saw, Meili's, memories…"

"Anastasia": "————"

Subaru responded with perfect honesty to Echidna's questions without attempting to deceive her.

Just as he said that, to her side, Emilia held her breath, and in front of him, Echidna closed her eyes. Next to them, Beatrice, Julius and Ram each respectively had expressions of worry and grief floating across their faces.

"The Book of the Dead had shown Subaru Meili's memories.

There was not a single person here who would not be able to understand what that meant.

Could there have been a mistake, and the memories in Meili's Book had been laid out there by some error? How easy would it have been to comfort oneself by clinging onto such futile hope.

However, in this place, he was not alone in not wanting to surrender himself to this deception and escaping towards the more comfortable option.

Especially for the girls right next to Subaru whose cheeks had stiffened in distress trying to bear this.

Beatrice: "Calm down, Subaru, in fact. Calm down, and focus on regaining yourself, I suppose."

Subaru: "…So… rry."

Beatrice: "It's okay, in fact. Right now, you can rely on Betty, I suppose… This isn't just your fault Subaru, in fact. Don't beat yourself up, I suppose."

Subaru: "————"

Beatrice had stood up and hugged Subaru's head as he breathed unsteadily.

It was ironic, as whilst checking on Subaru's wellbeing, the little girl that was gently stroking his black hair with her hands would keep his heart, scattered into thousands of little pieces, at the water's edge.

Beatrice had so benevolently said that it had not been Subaru's fault.

However, this was no one's fault but "Natsuki Subaru's", who had committed this crime. Not knowing this fact, Beatrice was speaking gently to him and treating him kindly; it was so absurd that it was almost comical, yet harrowing.

Julius: "——Miss Ram, what do you think?"

As Beatrice and Subaru were having such an exchange, Julius, with a serious look etched on his face had turned towards Ram and tried to get her input on the matter.

Compared to the others, the complexion of those two had not paled in shock to the same extent. Following Meili's memories, it was known that these two had been the most wary about her.

At least, Meili had felt that both Ram and Julius had never lacked in vigilance towards her, as she had once been an assassin

Conversely, she had certainly taken note of Emilia and Echidna's carelessness towards her.

Julius: "If you believe the words that Subaru just spoke, Miss Meili has already…"

Ram: "There is no way Barusu would be skillful or cold-hearted enough to conjure up a lie in this situation… I am certain that the Book is Meili's. To make sure, we could have someone else check it?"

Holding her slender arms, Ram glared down at the Book still lying on the floor.

Following that speech, Julius frowned in thought and stated,

Julius: "——If I were to…"

Ram: "Would there even be any leeway for you, since you would be reading one of these Books for a second time? So to speak, what if doing it a second time means you end up in the same state as Barusu. Of course, we could also presume that it has only resounded to this degree in Barusu due to him being immature and inexperienced…"

Julius: "————"

Ram: "But unfortunately, when it comes to whether your current mindset can be said to be more stable than Barusu's, Ram has not evaluated it as being any better."

Standing up stiffly, Julius held his breath as he heard Ram's words, who had narrowed her light-pink eyes.

However, he quickly shook his head and said, "That's reasonable…".

Julius: "…It is bitter, but, I have no basis to reject the words of Miss Ram. Yesterday, when I acted in this predicament so selfishly and arbitrarily without consulting anyone… I am definitely not qualified to do this at all."

"Anastasia": "I am sorry, but I also agree."

Echidna raised her hand and barged her way into the conversation after hearing Julius's self-deprecating words.

And, whilst fiddling with the white scarf wrapped around the base of her neck,

"Anastasia": "However, the basis of my argument is not the state of mind Julius is in. Purely, I am only stating my opposition to this because, from looking at the state Natsuki-kun is in, it is too dangerous to try this."

Ram: "It is pretty much a fact that it is dangerous. It is quite obvious that this situation is very much twisted."

Julius: "Indeed. Compared to last time, it seems that the influence from reading the Book is much stronger. The only question is whether this is down to reading the Book more than once or whether it is due to the specific Book you read."

Ram: "Maybe it is both the number of times you read it, and who the Book belongs to?"

As Ram and Julius wrack their brains, Echidna nods at the two with an "Ahh",

"Anastasia": "Simply put, could there be a mechanism where the burden increases the more Books you read…? Or, perhaps, could it be that it warps your mind due to seeing the memories of a person that was close to you? I think the possibilities are divided into two."

Ram: "A person close to you, huh?"

Echidna had raised her fingers, and to her conjecture, Ram turned towards Subaru. Seeing her glaring at him, Subaru desperately tried not to scream from where he was, his face pressed against the middle of Beatrice's delicate chest.

Most likely, Echidna's guesses were correct.

The reason why Subaru's heart had suffered so much damage was due to her latter guess—— the cause of this burden was likely because he had looked at the memories of someone he was quite well-acquainted with.

People involved in closer relationships—— those fresh records of Life would bring a greater impact.

It was natural that people would be more interested in close companions than in people they had more distant relationships with.

Subaru also wished this as a fact. As a matter of fact, Subaru, and Meili's minds had almost merged together, and he was coming to grips with that he wanted to know her.

As a result, Subaru had come to face the unfathomable emptiness in the depth of "Oneself".

That young girl had been carrying this feeling of emptiness for all of her life——

Emilia: "——Anyways, we can't sit still without doing anything. Let's go and search for Meili."

A strong feeling of silence echoed across the room.

It had been Emilia who had looked up firmly with both of her hands placed upon her chest and said this. Emilia had gained everyone's attentions in the Library, and Subaru widened his eyes at her words.

Subaru: "Search…?"

——Search, searching… What the heck. What was the meaning of this?

——Meili, she, *damn, but "I" am already dead.*

——Even though they never even cared about her before she died.

Emilia: "Even if we find her, it's probably too late. If only we had been with that girl, but probably we couldn't have. But, at the very least, we need to find her body."

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "So, no one at all knows where that little girl could have wandered off to? First of all, we shall find her… And after that, we will see what we can do. Let's go search for her."

Emilia's words were not solid, they were far off from being reliable and wise.

What was the point of this? The insistence of the "*me*" inside Subaru remained unchanging. Moreover, it should have argued that it was a useful way of using time, if it was being a realist.

However, no one in this place opposed Emilia's suggestion.

There was not a single person who would flatly deny her and say that was erring.

Therefore, what followed Emilia's proposal was a realistic discussion on how to go about searching for Meili. She announced that they would split into groups to search for her.

Emilia: "We have no choice but to change our plan for today. We need to split up and search for her."

Ram: "Before we do that… Ram will go and check to see if Rem is safe. Before going out to call for Emilia-sama, Barusu and everyone else, I was with her in the Spirit's room… I will go back now, once again."

Julius: "That's okay, Miss Ram… Subaru, it seems like a cruel thing to ask, but I want to make sure. Did you also happen to see Miss Meili's last moments in her Book of the Dead?"

Subaru hesitated to answer Julius's carefully worded inquiry.

The answer to that question, on whether he had seen Meili's last moments, was a yes. Subaru had experienced the very moment in which Meili's life had been snuffed out.

Her neck had been strangled, her consciousness had slipped away as she was being choked, her thoughts had been filled with hatred and despair, and then it had stopped abruptly—— it must have been in that very moment that her life had ceased.

It was Natsuki Subaru who had experienced this and had been complicit in hiding the girl's corpse.

Natsuki Subaru was helping the man who killed "me". The Natsuki Subaru who knew "me", was helping none other than "Natsuki Subaru", the most detestable in this world.

"Anastasia": "——Natsuki-kun, I want you to answer. Did you see her last moments? Where is she now? Did you see what on earth caused her death?"

Subaru: "————"

Echidna had kept hounding Subaru with questions to as he remained speechless. It felt like the emotions in her words indicated that she was feeling suspicious on her pretty countenance.

Her words made him feel on edge. His heartbeat quickened, his back started to sweat. He feared that Beatrice, by his side, could notice this.

——In fact, Subaru wondered if everyone knew that he had some involvement in Meili's death.

Subaru wondered if they already knew, and were feigning ignorance in order to draw out a confession from him by employing devious tricks to corner him.

These crazy ideas crossed his mind. But, each time these ideas came to his mind, the look in their eyes denied these thoughts as being plausible.

Emilia, Beatrice, Echidna and Julius's eyes had turned towards Subaru.

His thoughts scuzzy, Subaru was only struggling to frantically protect himself and his hands stained with blood. He possessed such an ugly, rotten heart; that was what it seemed like.

Then, better yet, listen to "my" desires——

Subaru: "——I didn't see up until the point where she died. There's no doubt though that she's inside the Tower though."

Subaru bit down firmly the temptations brought by that "*me*".

Dangerous feelings were sprouting up deep down inside of him—— she was trying to convince Subaru to confess to his crime. That was the sweet curse left behind by Meili Portroute.

These thoughts were certainly newly born within Subaru.

They wanted Emilia and the others to find Meili's dead body. Find her, mourn her, repent for what had happened, make him feel sorrow; the thoughts inside of him wanted to relieve the emotions coiled within his heart.

He was getting to the point where he too no longer knew who out of Natsuki Subaru, "*myself*", and "Natsuki Subaru" desired what.

"Anastasia": "…Do you have any strength left to read the Book again?"

Beatrice: "Echidna!"

Echidna had thrown out a suggestion at him which could be called completely ruthless, as he struggled to decide on what he wanted. For a second, Subaru tried to reply with a "If you say I have to do it", but before he could, Beatrice had snapped at her.

While still hugging Subaru's head, Beatrice's round eyes sharpened.

Beatrice: "What name does Betty have to shout out, in fact…! In any case, I won't let that happen, I suppose. Past this, I oppose it, for both emotional and other reasons, in fact."

"Anastasia": "Given the risks of being joined together as one, I would never have seriously recommended it. I wanted to make sure he was prepared just in case, that's all. You know, It wasn't my intention to make him do it even if he insisted."

Beatrice: "…Let us hope that was what you were really thinking, I suppose."

Beatrice spoke angrily over his shoulder to Echidna who was hastily taking back her words.

Immediately after this exchange, it was Emilia and Julius simultaneously who broke the awkward silence that the two had left behind.

"Emilia: "That's enough! I also don't agree with making Subaru do more reckless things. I also don't want us to be forever discussing this here… we need to start moving quickly."

Julius: "I completely agree with Emilia-sama—— In these circumstances, we can assume it is very likely that an accident befell Miss Meili. Something may have happened, like slipping off the balcony or off the stairs, or she could have gone outside the Tower…"

Shaula: "——That's not what haaappened."

Out of nowhere, Shaula who had yet to participate in the conversation until then, interjected to deny the concerns that Julius had blurted out.

She had picked up Meili's Book of the Dead, that had fallen at the woman's feet. While picking it up by its spine, she was shaking it from left to right.

Shaula: "Beeecause, if ankle-biter number two had gone outside the Tower, I would definitely have turned into a *satsujin kikai*[165]! What I mean by that, is that no one went outy-side~."

[165] Engrish flip. Means "killing machine" (殺人機械), originally "キリングマシーン" (killing machine).

Emilia: "You sure are quick to touch the Book that we hesitate to touch, for some reason."

Shaula: "Leaving it out on the floor makes me feel kinda anxious. Like, what if someone thinks that it's disrespectful towards the Library… I don't actually want to be a *tairyou satsugai no omae*[166], you know?"

With that said, Shaula was throwing the "Book of the Dead" around her hands as if juggling it.

Her attitude seemed to be one born out of fear of disrespecting the Library, however, it felt more unscrupulous in effect than anything. Julius scowled at her attitude.

Julius: "Miss Shaula, I would like for you to stop messing about with the Book. You are…"

Shaula: "You guys think that my heart isn't filled with grief or something like thaaat? I'm not sure I said such a thing. For sure ankle-biter number two clung to me quite often. I also didn't dislike Number Two, but… ultimately, except for Master, I don't give a fig about anyone elseee!"

Looking quite indifferent, Shaula smiled and disregarded Julius's words.

He was unable to catch a glimpse of any evil intent in what she had said. It was undoubtedly what Shaula really felt, at least, that was how Subaru perceived it.

In brief, she was one of those people who he found hard to comprehend certain emotions within her heart, compared to ordinary people.

——Actually, no. Ever since he had come to this place, Subaru had only had a limited amount of contact with them; it was no wonder he was incapable of comprehending their true feelings.

He wondered what complex emotions could be hiding on the other side of the mask of her smiling face.

Though, that was just something he had come to realize all too well now, after assimilating "*my*" life.

Emilia: "——Let's split up, we'll look for Meili. Subaru, you stay here with Beatrice."

And amidst Subaru's self-condemnation and the awkward atmosphere left behind by Shaula.

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[166] Engrish flip. Means "mass-murdering presence" (大量殺害のおまえ), originally "プレゼンツのキルゼムオール" (kill 'em all presence). Witch Cult Translations adds that this really makes no sense, and does not seem to be a reference.

Emilia raised her voice and interjected with a few words to urge them all into action. Subaru's heart panged with shame at hearing the girl's instructions.

They want to find "me"——

Emilia: "Beatrice, I'm leaving Subaru to you, ok? I'm going to go look around where Reid is."

Beatrice: "Very well, in fact—— Emilia and everybody else, be careful, I suppose."

Exchanging these words, and placing him under Beatrice's care, Emilia and Beatrice sorted out everyone's roles, praying for some stroke of luck in this situation.

Emilia took Ram, Echidna and Julius with her, and went back into the Tower to search for Meili.

As he saw them disappearing out of the Library, Subaru could not find any words to see them off——

Beatrice: "——Well then, I guess you aren't thinking about going with them, in fact."

After seeing off the search party, she had been left behind next to Subaru. Whilst glaring at Shaula, Beatrice had bluntly said this.

At receiving Beatrice's scathing glance, Shaula replied in an exaggerated tone with a "Buuuuuuut",

Shaula: "You gotta remember my role here is just the Star-Keeper, nooo? So, given that I've taken that title, my body and soul belong to Master… so if Master was to wish for it, I would follow his requests with all I haaave."

Beatrice: "If that's the case, then you must also go and search for Meili, I suppose. Don't just dawdle here."

Shaula: "——Hm, reaaally, is that so?"

Suddenly, Shaula craned her neck and looked towards Subaru, the look on her face looking almost coquettish.

Looking over Beatrice's head, she questioned Subaru on that matter directly. There was something bewitching about her appearance—— Shaula's facial expression, rather than the usual nonchalant

appearance on her face, for the first time showed signs of something else other than the usual youthful demeanor she possessed.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru's heart once again leapt at seeing the charm in her face, it was as if he had been endured a surprise attack. He reflexively raised his face and looked back into Shaula's black irises, from which he was unable to read anything.

Face-to-face with Subaru, Shaula's lips relaxed, and showing no traces of malintent she held the Book of the Dead in front of her ample breasts.

Shaula: "If Master wished me to do so, I would even knock down the moooon. That's why I want to hear it from Master, not from the half-devil, or from ankle-biter number one, or from the pretty boy."

Subaru: "I…"

Shaula: "Master, what should I dooo? Do you want me to look for ankle-biter number two? Or…?"

Shaula trailed off her words, choosing not to say anything past that point.

However, while looking for Subaru's decision and while she held the Book of the Dead by her breasts, Shaula refrained herself from saying any more. Subaru reflected but could not come up with anything to say to her unwavering attitude.

Where was the right answer deep down in himself?

Subaru: "————"

His conflicted emotions towards what Emilia and the others had suggested were proof of Natsuki Subaru's current contradictory existence.

——Meili Portroute, her life, which by no means could be said to have been long.

By having read the contents within her Book of the Dead, it had snatched away at him as it liked, as if digesting parts of him; blasphemously chewed, swallowed, and digested with an invisible stomach.

"Natsuki Subaru" had fully savored the life of "*me*" in two senses.

As a result, the mixed consciousnesses of Natsuki Subaru and "Natsuki Subaru" were divided into something which half resembled schizophrenia, having also now taken in the little girl.

——Subaru wanted to conceal the manner in which Meili had "died".

——Subaru wished for them to find Meili's dead body that he himself had hidden.

——*Subaru hated "Natsuki Subaru" who killed "me"*.

And thus, contradicting wishes were born inside of Subaru, spurring him in trying to make their desires come true.

Subaru: "——Shaula, go and search for Meili. Please go and help Emilia and everyone else."

Before he could even notice it, Subaru was issuing out something like an order regarding what to do about Meili.

Receiving his instructions, Shaula raised her eyebrows and straightened her body into a salute.

Shaula: "Roger that! If that's what Master wishes, I will do whateeever you desire!"

Winking at him while giving him a loving salute, Shaula held out the Book towards Subaru. He received the Book which felt like a black weight in that moment; Shaula stuck out her tongue at Subaru whose face had scrunched up into a frown.

She looked somewhat mischievous, just like she was getting her own back; she turned away from Subaru and jumped down the Library stairs with one giant leap. He saw her swaying black hair gradually disappear from his sights. Feeling as if he had been released from a great feeling tension, Subaru let out a sigh of relief.

Subaru: "Such strange things…"

——The falsely accused Natsuki Subaru, who did not want to divulge his participation in the crime, or let them find her dead body.

——*"I", the victim, wished for them to find my body and clear the anger and regret from myself.*

——"Natsuki Subaru", the perpetrator, who murdered people and piled up acts of wickedness one after the other.

All these thoughts existed alongside each other in one body, all of them loomed over and made an attempt to press Natsuki Subaru into selecting one of their choices.

If he truly only cared about his own skin, he would have shut his mouth regarding Meili's life and death, he would have worked his brain harder to falsify the contents he had seen within the Book of the Dead.

In fact, he was incapable of doing that, Subaru would not really have the intelligence to do such an act, but more than that, he felt hostility towards "Natsuki Subaru" and emphasized towards "*my*" *own regrets*—— there was anger towards himself, in letting such a wicked being do as it pleased.

It was true that last time, and the time before that, and even before that, that someone had murdered Subaru.

But even that seemed like a plot set up by "Natsuki Subaru" lurking inside of Subaru. It seemed likely that it was a trap, set up to make Subaru act rashly and hate the others.

After all, what he had thought before reading the Book of the Dead was right, was it not?

Emilia, Meili and everyone else, not one of them was truly evil. The only one who was evil was Natsuki Subaru, was it not?

Beatrice: "Subaru, it's not good for you to be languishing in thought, in fact. It'd be better if you let go of that Book, I suppose."

Subaru: "————"

Just noticing her, Beatrice was kneeling right beside him, looking at him with a look of concern in her eyes.

Right in front of him, she was giving him a look of concern—— it resurfaced in his mind that Emilia had looked at him in the exact same way. A sense of discomfort took hold of Subaru's heart.

The emotions that Beatrice was letting off—— they were not directed towards Natsuki Subaru himself, rather, they were directed at "Natsuki Subaru".

It seemed such a terribly dishonest thing to do, receiving this himself after having hidden the fact that he had lost his memory, and on top of that, having kept his silence about the true nature of "Natsuki Subaru".

Shouldn't he tell them?

Before he knew it, it had been the current Natsuki Subaru who had violently snatched Meili's "life" from her. If that was what was going to happen, then, before that danger was once again turned towards Emilia, Beatrice and the others——

Subaru: "…Why are you so kind to me?"

Beatrice: "——Wait, that's such a sudden question, in fact. What's the matter, I suppose."

Subaru: "No, never mind…"

As a final word on this matter, if he was to crack the meaning behind the relationships he had borrowed, maybe he needed to hear what had occurred before becoming like so—— their real opinion.

He needed to know the real meaning as to why Emilia, Beatrice, and everyone else had such so much faith in "Natsuki Subaru", and were always turning towards "Natsuki Subaru."

Subaru: "————"

The moment he tried to put some deep thought into it, a feeling of hesitation rose inside of Subaru's heart.

That which "*I*" had turned towards Elsa. Emilia and the others, who in this world treat Natsuki Subaru as someone close to them, they would turn towards "Natsuki Subaru".

A gemstone that only Natsuki Subaru could have, that only he could gaze upon.

The traces, the lingering scent, the remnants, the warmth that should have been there, why was it that only Natsuki Subaru was exposed to it in such proximity?

Subaru: "————"

Why, such a man.

Why, such a cruel human being.

Why, a man with such a cruel smile.

Why, this man involved in Elsa's death.

Why, this man who had laughed as he murdered Meili.

Why, this man who had tried to conceal "*my*" death.

Why, was such a man, this man, this man—— so loved?

Subaru: "————"

I want to know. I don't know. I want to know. I don't know. Only me, only Subaru, only "I" do not know the reason. I don't know. I don't understand. It's all so one-sided.

Subaru: "————"

If I ask, will I understand? If I ask, will I be able to call it into question? Can you tell me?

Did you think it was genuine? The smile I expressed, the smile I showed was a fake, there was emptiness in my heart. That's because everyone wears masks, even you, Natsuki Subaru. Even despite you not having wanted to show it to your mother and father outside the house.

If there's a way to know the truth, then where is it? What do they all really think of me, what are their true feelings, why do they all believe in "Natsuki Subaru"?

"I" can give that to you—— a way to know about this.[167]

[167] This whole bit of narration in italics is Subaru's internal thoughts, which are usually represented in italics, and somewhat conflicts with the representation of Meili's pronoun. The only instance in which Meili interjects is this last sentence.

Subaru: "————"

A voice resonating in his mind cruelly seduced him. And he realized that the solution to the problem that had dominated his thoughts for so long, was close by.

Hadn't there been a way to know the answer to this resting in between his arms up until now?

Beatrice: "Subaru?"

Staring at the silent Subaru, Beatrice narrowed her eyes with uneasiness.

Without returning her gaze, Subaru simply looked down between his arms.

Subaru: "————"

——A black, heavy tome, it seemed like it was offering a gruesome welcome to his curiosity.

Arc 6 Chapter 48 - ——Murder Becomes a Habit[168]

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 5 “Murder Is a Habit”, Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (GracedHarperd, Ice/Ice_Occultism, Jaerek, Ringo) — Complete

Subaru: “————”

Subaru was silent as he looked down at the black cover of the Book of the Dead held in between his arms.

Beatrice nestled closer to him, and feeling her worried and strange gaze, Subaru did not dare to move.

Until now, what had dominated Natsuki Subaru’s mind were questions he would ask himself without any particular answer, as if engaging in zen dialogue[169].

Truth was, that which was occupying Subaru’s mind were just shallow thoughts that could be discarded as just wasteful thinking

They were the laughable, vague questions of a child.

——Everyone, no matter who, always had an inner face which others would never see.

This was an obvious truth which everyone learned as they came of age.

The expression of hatred behind a smile, the sorrow and tears behind their anger. Human beings were ones that could pretend that these emotions did not exist, while hiding their true feelings.

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[168] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Refer to the previous chapter for the format in which Subaru thinking as Meili is presented. In addition, something will happen in this chapter that will make it more natural/easier to represent Meili’s interjections this time around”. An additional note by me, the reason why this Chapter’s title was changed will be made clear by the end. It’s to best respect what it references.

[169] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “A rough example of what a zen dialogue is can be found here”.

It was impossible to fully understand the true wishes, the true desires, the true intentions, of those human beings.

Brothers, sisters, parents, children, spouses, family members, one could never fully come to understand any of them.

Friends, childhood friends, best friends, lovers, no matter how close one's relationship became, by no means would it ever be possible to uncover what was hidden deep inside them.

What they loved. What they desired. What they preferred. Who they let their guard down around. Who they felt comfortable with. These were completely different problems to those various connections of mind and body.

Indeed, he was aware of that. But, still, he wished not to abandon these thoughts just for the sake of it.

He wanted to know, he wanted to understand it, he wanted to hear it, he wanted them to reveal everything. That was his arrogant, but desired wish. Even more so, when both his own and the others' lives were hanging by a thread. Even if there were absolutely no means of doing so, nor would one come to be.

——No, there was supposed to be absolutely no means of doing so.

He laughed at the thought of it, sure, there was supposed to be absolutely no way to do such a thing.

But, in this Library of Taygeta, Subaru ended up finding out how.

Subaru: "————"

——Meili Portroute.

By reading her Book of the Dead, Subaru had vicariously experienced Meili's life, understood what she thought and felt, and who she hated at the time of her demise.

Of course, this extremely short experience did not define the girl called Meili entirely.

The time she had spent alive was too long to even accept all her individual events into his brain. Even if the life she had lived had been a short one, he could by no means have absorbed into him all of her memories.

Eagerly gnawing away at the key points, drinking them in with the intention of understanding Meili.

Those were how Natsuki Subaru felt right now, such was painfully clear to see.

However, but, even so.

By comprehending that he did not understand even a bit of the girl, Subaru now had a deeper understanding of Meili than ever before.

——There was a person whom "*I*" cherished. Her life had been stolen away from *me*, and, now alone, *my* heart continued to wander. Being with Subaru and the others, who were the ones responsible for that, *I* struggled to understand what exactly *my* purpose was. *I* went to the Library to find her Book of the Dead, and *I* felt ashamed and in despair when *I* was discovered.

Meili, whom Subaru knew absolutely nothing about.

He had discovered the girl's innermost feelings and desires without even expecting it, and thus he had realized.

That this Book of the Dead itself was the mean to truly find out the true intentions of others, without any falsehoods between.

Subaru: "————"

It was just that he wanted to know, it was the only thing he desired.

The real intentions of Emilia, Beatrice, and the others in the Tower were what he wished to know. He wanted to know why they put so much trust in "Natsuki Subaru".

Why did they believe "Natsuki Subaru", who was responsible for killing "*me*"?

And now, what did they think of Subaru, who desperately pretended to be the despicable "Natsuki Subaru"?

Intimacy was just camouflage, hatred was reality, and feelings like anger, sadness and joy were temporary. Hostility and malice, were those not their true feelings?

I don't know. I want to know. I want to trust them. I can't trust them.

Are Emilia and the others allies, or are they enemies; are they enemies who killed Subaru, or are they allies that want him to live?

Can I love them, or can't I? Can I hate them, or can't I?

——Won't I obtain that answer by reading their Book of the Dead?

Beatrice: "…Subaru, you really look terrible, in fact. If you are feeling uneasy here, it'd be better if we went somewhere else for you to rest, I suppose."

Touching Subaru's shoulder, who was immersed in thought, Beatrice gave her suggestion.

Subaru was rendered breathless for a minute, being trapped by the gaze of her characteristic blue butterfly pattern in her eyes. Looking at it, the girl's tiny, tiny palm rested on Subaru's shoulder.

What would happen if he took her hand, grabbed her head and smashed it on the floor with all his strength?

Subaru: "How, small…"

Beatrice: "Wh-what are you suddenly saying, in fact? This smallness is exactly the reason behind Betty's loveliness, I suppose. Subaru has also said that, in fact."

Subaru reflexively relaxed his cheeks, as Beatrice sullenly blurted this out.

Certainly, were Subaru in his normal state, it would not have been weird for him to have said that. Noticing the similarity between himself and "Natsuki Subaru", he smiled bitterly.

Small. Truly, Beatrice was just, a small child.

Her neck was thin, her bones fragile. The hand that rested on Subaru's shoulder was small enough to be fully covered by his palm. If he put even a bit of strength into his arms whilst hugging her, it seemed like her fragile body would break.

If these thoughts were turned to actions, he should be able to easily kill her.

——If he killed her, if her life blinked out of existence, would her Book appear in the Library?

???: "Just like you did with me, nooo~?"

Subaru: "————"

Suddenly, Subaru heard a voice from his subconscious, one which would be impossible to call his own.

It was somewhat sweet, glossy enough to sound adult, but it was a strangely "familiar" voice. In a short period of time, the voice had become familiar enough that he could call it his own.

The voice inside him was that of the dead little girl who mocked Natsuki Subaru's intentions.

Subaru: "————"

However, Subaru discarded this event, concentrating on the matter in front of him.

That was, whether the "Book of the Dead" could be realistically utilized.

If so, then how would he go about making this come true——

Beatrice: "Your face looks really pale, I suppose. Indeed, we should go somewhere else, in fact. But before that…"

Subaru: "——Ah."

Beatrice: "I must return that where it originally was, I suppose. It's no good for Betty too, to be in the haze, in fact."

Saying that, Beatrice took the Book of the Dead from Subaru's stiff hands. She held it cautiously to ensure the Book would not open, and placed it where an empty gap in the bookshelf was present; the place where it originally had been.

Beatrice: “It’s easy to understand and remember where it was positioned, I suppose. However, it’s possible that the Books in this Library will just start moving on their own…”

Subaru: “A safety measure, huh… That’s, mhm, yeah, I suppose that’s right.”

Beatrice: “You ought to think that bringing it out is pretty dangerous, in fact. This is safer than throwing them out onto the floor because Shaula was concerned about that, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I feel like being in this Library is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

Subaru dryly spat these words out in conversation.

In reality, even in the world which Subaru knew, it was said that opportunities such as coming across a book which had been published quite some years prior would only come once. Just like coming across a second-hand bookstore while travelling, if he missed out on this opportunity, it was possible that he would never find the book ever again. This speculation may also apply to this Library.

Like usual, had he been overthinking this? No doubt that this thought was bothering him.

Either way, whilst warily looking at Beatrice’s back as she struggled to arrange the Books, Subaru immersed himself deeper and deeper into his sea of thoughts.

Awfully realistically, counting backwards the lives from the warmth he had felt, he searched for a way to kill her.

Although, Beatrice was not the only one he should think about. Every single one of the members inside the Tower were in the position of becoming a target to Subaru’s plan involving the Books of the Dead.

Meili: “So you want to try and kill them because you want to check if they can be trusted, or if they should be doubted. Onii-san truly is waaarped~.”

The voice of the little girl interrupted him, causing Subaru to inwardly click his tongue.

The first thing he wanted to say back was that he thought of it as a necessary thought-experiment.

By no means was Subaru a psychopath dominated by homicidal impulses, he was not controlled by such abnormal urges whereby he must take pleasure in deeds like that.

But, right now, when thinking this through, this had been the only choice that had come to his mind. It seemed rational.

Meili: "Enough with the excuses… I wooonder~, can't you just tell me what you're going to do?"

——It would be very easy to get rid of Beatrice.

This was because she was showing her back to Subaru, unprotected, defenseless, completely unguarded.

It could clearly be stated that Beatrice's life was precariously balanced by a thread which depended entirely on Subaru's flawed reasoning. Once that "rationality" surpassed reason, Subaru would very likely take the girl's life quite easily.

Regarding Beatrice, the only options he had were to do, or to not do. It seemed possible to entirely disregard the countless other possibilities that branched off as an alternative from his standpoint.

Meili: "Weeell~, what abooout~ the half-witch onee-san?"

The likes of Emilia would be even easier, a piece of cake.

Once, he had even seized her by the neck after he had woken up. Back then, she had not displayed any signs of resistance. As long as Subaru put all of his strength into his arms, he could easily throttle that fragile neck of hers.

He could say with certainty that she possessed strength similar to that of a pro wrestler, but it meant naught unless she was prepared to use it. If in an instant, he would strangle her neck with all his strength.

Meili: "Fufufu, it's your speciality, eeeh~?"

——Ram, despite her sharp tongue, was, in essence, also merely a weak girl.

It reminded Subaru of the time she cried while pressing her head against him, entreating him for his memories. With her thin arms desperately embracing him, weak, she was just a girl, after all.

Echidna was similar as well. Come to think of it, they were all weak girls. He had really made the wrong selection of people, if the mission was to cross the desert. As much as he would have liked to have more suitable people with him, there really just were not enough people to go around.

Therefore, even though Subaru could take advantage of that chance, the last obstacle in his way was a different story.

Subaru: "——Julius."

The one obstacle that stood in his way was a man much like Subaru, this character which until now carried a sword in hand.

For him to say that it would be a good idea to strike at him head-on was impossible—— one could also say it was a suicidal act to strike at Emilia head-on, but that was a whole other story.

In any case, if he was to implement the Book of the Dead Plan, the man would be the biggest wall in his way.

In other words, Julius was the one he should beat first.

Meili: "With the amount of time it takes to search for the Books, however much time you have, it's not going to be enough riiight~?"

According to the words of the girl, Subaru's purpose was not simply "kill and be done with it".

Rather, killing was a necessity, a passing point that must be cleared—— as his desires laid ahead, on the side of the Books of the Dead obtained in exchange for death.

For that purpose, it was necessary to be certain.

He had killed, he had failed, so he could not let it end like this. Beyond this, he had a goal.

Beatrice: "Subaru, that's enough Books for the moment, in fact. Let's get far away from here… like the Spirit Room or somewhere like that, I suppose. You should calm down there, in fact."

Subaru: "Spirit… room…"

Beatrice, coming back and taking Subaru's hand, helped him to stand up; Subaru was reminded of the room with the Spirit, and his restart point came to mind.

That place was the Green Room, and at that place——

Subaru: “Patrasche…”

Beatrice: “…You’re saying that ground dragon’s name again. Geez, there’s no point worrying about an *aikata*[170] like you, I suppose. Betty was the worried one… unbelievable, in fact.”

Subaru: “…S-sorry. I didn’t mean it like that.”

For a moment, the figure of the black ground dragon brushed his mind, and his lips softened. As Beatrice reproached him, Subaru hurriedly came back to his senses.

However, even in this scene, Patrasche remained the only one who Subaru could put his trust in.

Actually, only Patrasche, who had risked death to defend Subaru, regardless of her true intentions or feelings, was a being who had remained by the side of Natsuki Subaru——

Meili: “Really? If she knew that onii-san isn’t «Natsuki Subaru», I still wooonder~ if she would do the same thing.”

Subaru: “————”

Meili: “After all, on onii-san’s side… there’s no one, is there?”

Resonating in his mind was a smiling voice, ridiculing Subaru.

Haunting him, an existence that differed from Natsuki Subaru attempted to break his optimism.

It was a silly point, and he would have been better off laughing it away. However, at this moment, Subaru could not afford that. His heart came to half-agree with the girl’s words.

He reckoned that even considering the kindness that made Patrasche give her entire being, that which was directed at “Natsuki Subaru”, were she to discover that the current Subaru was a fake, she would come to disregard him.

Beatrice: “Hey, Subaru, give me your hand, I suppose.”

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[170] Engrish flip. Means “partner (who shares one’s load)” (相肩), originally “パートナー” (partner). The word chosen isn’t the best here, but given Subaru and Beatrice’s deep relationship, it feels fitting.

Subaru: “Ah, sure…”

His brain being toyed around by the girl’s voice, Subaru grit his teeth with hard-to-accept emotions.

Consequently, his vision started to shift out of focus. Holding out her hand, in an attempt to hold his, suddenly she made a face indicating that she had noticed something. Her gaze was directed at Subaru’s wrist—— she had noticed it.

Beatrice: “There are scratches, in fact… and, so many…”

Rolling up the sleeve of Subaru’s right arm, Beatrice furrowed her eyebrows at the scratch marks, pathetic and painful to look at. Even if it seemed she had not noticed the scratches deeply bored further up in his arm, just the forearm was enough.

Subaru: “————”

At the moment, Beatrice was not cognizant of the manner of Meili’s death.

She therefore should not be able to immediately connect these scratches with Meili’s death. But, even discounting this, she should be wondering where the hell he had gotten these wounds.

If Meili’s corpse were to be found, she would inevitably be suspicious.

Subaru: “————”

His unprepared heart began beating like an alarm bell going off.

Before his eyes, laying her eyes upon his hand, Beatrice did not notice that expression of his. With instant action it would be possible to take care of Beatrice.

Meili: *“What are you gonna dooo? Shouldn’t you get started already?”*

As if playing with his self-confidence, the voice urged Subaru to a decision.

His temple throbbed from the blood circulating through it, along with his pounding heart.

As things were, depending on what Beatrice continued with, he would have to——

Beatrice: “——It seems you scratched your arm again, in fact. A bad habit, I suppose.”

Subaru: “…Ah?”

Beatrice: “This isn’t good, in fact. Had Emilia noticed it, you would’ve made her really worried, I suppose. Even Betty can’t overlook this when it’s this bad, in fact.”

Tracing Subaru’s scars with her fingers, Beatrice painfully cast her eyes down.

Following those remarks, Subaru was unable to move from the unexpected impact of her words.

It was almost as if Beatrice was familiar to seeing the scratches that covered Subaru’s arm.

Even so, supposing others noticed the scratches on Subaru, it was completely different from the horrible situation, for entirely different reasons—— there was no mistaking that, this time, the arm had been scratched in self-mutilation.

She had even stated that she had concealed this from Emilia, which in itself was shocking.

Beatrice: “If you go to the room with the Spirit, these wounds will be healed as well, I suppose. But still, because Betty cannot bear looking at it, Betty will heal it even if a little bit, in fact.”

With those words, Beatrice wrapped Subaru’s wrist with a pale light.

The cozy sensation that came about, warm was it was, was perhaps the twinge of his wounds healing up. Healing magic was what was being shown before his eyes.

Subaru: “————”

At the same moment, any hostility that Subaru had for Beatrice inside was rapidly swept away.

Along with this warmth, the humanity of Natsuki Subaru, which had ruptured along with the wounds on his wrist, certainly seemed to be restored as well.

Meili: “Boooring.”

The little girl grumbled in Subaru’s head, as if her hopes had been betrayed.

While listening to her directly in his skull, Subaru swallowed down the evil environment that had taken root in his head.

Certainly, it had been an option. But, it had been nothing more than an option.

There was no need for him to lead himself in the direction that longed for their Book of the Dead. Especially in a situation where no preparation had been set in place.

Subaru: "————"

Inflicting harm on Beatrice right now was not a good idea.

His preparations had yet to be readied. Even if he took the worst possible means, it must be done after thorough plans were made. As such, now, this place——

Beatrice: "Come now, let's go, I suppose. Subaru. Betty will eventually talk about it to everyone afterwards, in fact."

Subaru: "——Alright. Sorry to bother you, Beatrice."

Beatrice: "Promise not to speak about this, I suppose."

Although he did not know whether the concern of the girl before his eyes was genuine or not, Natsuki Subaru thought that he ought to listen to her.

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Firstly, though unrelated, there exists a phrase.

——"Murder becomes a habit".

That is one of the phrases the famous detective, Hercule Poirot, left the world with.

——"Murder becomes a habit".

The meaning of this phrase does not refer to a person who has killed a human being, and then, suddenly waking up with a preference for murdering people, repeats the crime to satisfy their cravings.

——"Murder becomes a habit".

It refers to someone who solved their problem once by murder, and, for them, whenever another problem arises, they will think about trying to break through the situation through murder again.

——"Murder becomes a habit".

By the time they start to consider that murder is not one of those options, the utmost important thing would have had already changed.

——"Murder becomes a habit".

Truth is, even if there was a single murderer who did not commit a crime by his own will, even if he dislikes the act, even if you see a glimpse of the memory of the one who had been harmed by such an action, that habit is not discarded.

——"Murder becomes a habit".

That habit… is not discarded.

——"Murder becomes a habit".[171]

[171] Hercule Poirot is a fictional detective created by the much-acclaimed writer Agatha Christie, holder of the Guinness World Record for the best-selling fiction writer of all time. She is renowned for her murder mystery novels. Anyway, this character states a phrase similar to this one, "murder is a habit", in Chapters 17, 27 and 28 of her novel, "Murder in Mesopotamia", and it is also the title of Chapter 24 of the same book. Normally I would've changed the title of this Chapter to fit the phrase it is quoting, but because of translation accuracy, and because this is an iconic Chapter, it is preferrable not to.

Arc 6 Chapter 49 – To You, the Worthless Excuse

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 5 “Murder Is a Habit”, Part 4 (up until half-way)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

Gradually, he became aware of a sensation of numbness coming out from his arm.

Slowly but steadily, the scratch marks of Meili’s dying throes were starting to vanish and heal. Realizing that he was being healed, Subaru turned his eyes away from his sleeve.

Subaru: “…Well, this room was certainly the big deal it was made out to be.”

They had stated that the Spirit who resided here in this ivy-filled room would heal the wounds of living beings. That said, as Subaru had yet to have the experience of visiting the room with any trauma up until now, he had doubted how effective it would be.

While relishing the sensation of his wounds actually being healed, he was being made to reconsider that he had been unnecessarily suspicious.

Meili: “Despite it being my dying message, Onii-san is stiiill~ being awful.”

Subaru: “————”

Meili: “But, Beatrice-chan’s judgement was terribly helpful, riiight~? Thanks to her, the evidence left around your wrists will disappeaaar~.”

The shade of the little girl incessantly speaking inside his head annoyed him.

What really anguished him, was that the girl’s words really struck deep into his heart, to the point it was impossible to say that they did not reflect Subaru’s inner thoughts.

He did not know whether this little girl's shade[172] was running rampant due to being part of Subaru, or whether it had been because of her ghost literally possessing him after reading her Book of the Dead.

Whatever the reason may be, he mustn't bend his ear to what the little girl was saying. He mustn't listen to her. Just that fact brought his sense of annoyance.

Thus, Subaru consciously closed his mind to the sound of these incessant hallucinations.

However, the more Subaru attempted to seclude himself in his own shell, the louder and more talkative her shade became, growing more impish in poking fun at Subaru. The most annoying thing was——

Meili: "——Right now, you don't have Beatrice beside you anymore, do yooou~? Since there's no one in your way, why don't you just get rid of that sleeping giiirl~?"

Subaru: "——Hk."

Meili: "Hehe… don't start looking like you're about to cry. I know you're trying to ignore me, but you can't, ah, onii-san's such an adorable guy! "

The little girl's voice, which had no corporeal presence, was heard by Subaru as if it was a whisper in his ear.

If he closed his eyes, it felt like the little girl was gently leaning on his back, her figure spitting out these sweet words to his ears accompanied by sweet sighs; it almost felt like he was able to gaze upon her hallucination.

He had been brought to the Spirit's room for rest, and once again Subaru was presented with the same choice as when holding the Book of the Dead.

Beatrice was on her way to tell Emilia and the others that Subaru had left the Library of Taygeta, and that she had brought him to this room. Right now, Subaru had procured some time when no one would be able to see what was going on. And, right in front of him was that girl sleeping on the ivy bed just as if she were an offering to him, all alone——

[172] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "It's more accurately illusion, instead of shade throughout the chapter; but shade still sounds cooler and conveys the illusory nuance so I left it like that".

Subaru: "…Rem."

Even if he attempted to say the name of the comatose girl out loud, no emotions arose within Subaru.

He had no known memories of her, he only knew her name. All he was aware of, was that she was Ram's twin sister, and that she was one of Emilia's companions. And that they had come to this Tower looking for a way to wake her up from her long slumber.

——Beyond that, he wanted to know more.

Meili: *"The means are there. It's either you do it or you don't do iiit~."*

The sweet girl's temptation reminded Subaru, whether he was willing or not, about the plan with the Books of the Dead.

Even though now she had fallen into a deep sleep, there must certainly have been a relation of some sort with Subaru at the time she had been in good health. By borrowing the powers of her Book of the Dead, he could find out what kind of relationship and feelings she possessed towards Subaru.

Above all, he would be able to take that life far more easily than Meili's.

The likes of this girl, in a comatose state as she was, could even be suffocated by just smothering her face with a damp cloth. He must do it quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly——

Subaru: "…Am I an idiot? No, I am definitely an idiot."

Restraining the feeling of impatience brimming in his arm, Subaru rethought his foolish idea.

Immediately carrying something out like that would not be good. Jumping at the situation in front of his eyes, as if drooling, would have no meaning if there was no continuation.

Killing was the method. Subaru desired to find out what everyone truly believed of him. As far as it came to achieving that result, this was also a good moment to screw up how he would do it, and rush the killings.

Even at the Library of Taygeta, hadn't he thought the same way? If he was to carry out his Book of the Dead Plan, he needed to choose the right order to eliminate the people carefully.

Subaru: “Julius, Emilia, Shaula, Ram, Echidna, Beatrice, Rem…”

Counting them on his fingers, Subaru listed the people who remained inside the Tower, excluding Meili—— namely, the order in which he would prefer to get their Book of the Dead if possible.

This order should enumerate who would most likely become a hindrance to his execution of the Book of the Dead Plan.

Conversely, unless he followed this hit-list he had come up with, if he were rush into it and act, then it would not work out—— he did not want to screw it up.

Meili: “If you don’t, then you’ll end up missing out on killing them. How scary.”

Subaru: “————”

He kept his silence towards the talkative shade. She seemed to give off quite a strong hint of displeasure towards him.

Nevertheless, even if he tried to direct words at her, her behavior would not alter. It would remain the same.

Subaru did not necessarily want to kill Emilia and the others.

But still, if he had to kill them, he wanted to go through with that only once.

Only once, only once was fine. And only if a complete plan was in his possession.

Subaru: “————”

And thus, with that in mind, Subaru sighed as piercing yellow eyes gaze at him.

Noticing them, the gaze came from the figure sitting right next to the sleeping girl in this Spirit’s room—— the gaze had come from his jet-black ground dragon, Patrasche.

Patrasche’s gaze seemed to be filled with worry and gloom as she regarded the exhausted Subaru.

It might be that, before leaving this place for a while, Beatrice had told her, “Keep an eye on Subaru, in fact”.

As long as Patrasche's eyes were focused on him, no matter how frustrated he got, he would be unable to commit any violence towards the sleeping girl. In that respect, he would like to thank Patrasche for having made him not make a premature decision in this matter.

But, after reading that Book of the Dead, Subaru was becoming unable to direct solid trust towards anyone, even to Patrasche, who he had felt a great deal of affection to.

Subaru: "…I wonder, is this all going to your plan, «Natsuki Subaru»?"

He wanted to believe in them. The more he pondered about their true intentions, the more Natsuki Subaru would isolate himself within this different world where he had no one to turn to.

Isn't this clearly because of the game presented by the wicked "Natsuki Subaru"?

Subaru: "————"

Bit-by-bit, the scratches caused by Meili continued healing.

Whilst savoring the feeling of his aches and pains fading away, Subaru rolled up his sleeve to the place the painful scars displaying "Natsuki Subaru was here" were carved. He traced his nails above the scabs, and realizes they were also being healed.

He did not mind that the scratches which served as proof of his horrible criminal acts were fading—— No, not his, he had not been himself then.

However, the message that indicated the self that was not his self, only that could he not erase.

Subaru: "This message as well."

The wound that had been carved into his left arm, and the one in his right arm too, had both been scratched in a similar manner.

On his still unfamiliar black arm mottled by sable spots, there was a wound that had not been there at first. He had carved this wound there as if returning the favor for the wound carved into his left arm by his other self.

——"Who are you?", he held that serious question engraved into him as a wound.

Subaru: “————”

And so, while injuring himself without giving a toss about his own body, Subaru, at the same time, was unable to recognize something.

???: “————Mm.”

The fact that Patrasche was gazing pitifully at the wound left behind on Subaru’s arm, as a result of his own self harm.

Even if the wounds Meili had bestowed him with were to disappear, if they were to look at Meili’s own hands, they would find it evident that she had died putting up a fight, trying to desperately ward off the one who had slain her.

The logic of thinking that he had concealed Meili’s murder from everyone was based entirely on his terribly sloppy cleanup afterwards.

All it would take is for one gear to collapse to set everything into motion.

Feeling like a marionette being dangled from the top of this Tower, standing on thin ice, turning his face away from the root of his problems, an amusing clown desperately fighting to keep his balance; that was what Subaru had become.

However, this amusing clown’s performance would finally earn itself a curtain call without encountering any more obstacles in his way. And that was because——

Luckily for him, Meili Portroute’s corpse “had not been found” anywhere.

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Subaru: “————”

The atmosphere around the dinner table was awfully heavy between everyone as they looked at each other.

This was due to the dangerous circumstances that they had found themselves in—— half of them recognized that their desperate search for Meili's body had been fruitless and that they had already been far too late.

Although they were too few to call their search an "all-out frontal assault", they had still split into groups and mobilized everyone so that they could search for her. As a result, they had spent almost half a day trying to find her without even finding a trace of her.

The feeling that all of it had been for naught had grown, it was understandable that many of them were experiencing immense levels of stress.

Ram: "Everything has just been going wrong since we came to this Tower, huh?"

Subaru: "…No need to put what was left unsaid so clearly, even if we're thinking that."

Whilst munching on his dinner which consisted of something like dry bread, he mumbled this, staring at Ram, with a growing feeling of lethargy.

Receiving Subaru's protests, Ram shrugged her shoulders, a blank look adorning her face. However, even for her usual calm and composed self, an aura of fatigue was coming off her.

And it was not just Ram, everyone in the Tower was in the same state as her.

Emilia: "For now… I first went to ask Reid about her, but he said he hadn't seen her. He said that no one had come there since yesterday, and that he was getting bored… I don't think he was lying. Since Meili had seen what Reid's like, I don't think she'd have gone there alone…"

Beatrice: "It's hard to imagine that even that arrogant man would harm such a little girl… though, I can't say that for sure, as scary as that is, I suppose. But, Betty ultimately agrees with Emilia's thoughts, in fact."

Emilia and Beatrice exchanged words between them regarding the red-haired, eyepatch-clad man who guarded the Second Floor.

Although in his mind that man had done nothing but cause him great torment, Emilia had faced him and more-or-less heard him out safely. It seemed like she had managed to come back unharmed.

Feeling a sense of relief by that fact, Subaru shook his head.

There was no reason for him to feel such a sense of relief, rather, he has no right to considering what had transpired before.

He did not know if he even had the right to comfort Emilia.

“Anastasia”: “——Can I mention one thing? It may sound cruel, but I want to propose something, and I am prepared that I may end up being shouted at because of it.”

Draining her bowl of bland soup, Echidna raised her hand as she finished her meager dinner. Facing everyone around the dinner table, she narrowed her turquoise eyes and spoke,

“Anastasia”: “Searching for that little girl, Meili… I think we should stop for today, and from tomorrow, we should focus on trying to capture this Tower again. What are your thoughts about that?”

Emilia: “——Hk! We will do no such thing! What would Meili think of us!?”

“Anastasia”: “It is already too late, she has no way to think or feel anything. That was proved by Natsuki-kun’s confirmation after reading her Book of the Dead. I am against further searching for her.”

Emilia had been the first to oppose Echidna’s proposal, which could be said to have been both realistic and level-headed. However, Echidna’s expression did not waver when hearing Emilia’s argument, purely borne from her emotions.

However, on behalf of Emilia, who was at a complete loss for words, Beatrice spoke in her place with a “Wait, I suppose“.

Beatrice: “Your point at first seems to make sense, in fact. But, it seems quite sudden for you to mention it, I suppose. Why is it that you want to stop the search for Meili, in fact?”

“Anastasia”: “——Was it really that strange to say? The food supplies we brought into this Tower are limited, and as more days pass by, it is likely that staying here will become more burdensome for everyone in each Camp. If our stay greatly drags on, then you ought to think that a search party will be sent out to look for us.”

Ram: “Naturally. Emilia-sama and Anastasia-sama… well, her contents right now are different, but both of you are esteemed candidates for the Royal Selection. You both should not even be in this Tower amid the sand sea.”

Beatrice and Ram began to display a somewhat lukewarm attitude, beginning with Echidna’s proposal. The suggestion, that went by the rules of rationality, served as a trigger for colder opinions, making the tense atmosphere around their dinner meeting more intense.

Shaula: “Gee~, this isn’t much fun. If you’re going to squabble, I’d rather you did it away from Master and I. But I don’t mind either way, as for meee, I’ll build a happy family with Master, just the two of us. A girl first, and then a boy, and then another boy[173]!”

He did not deign to reply to Shaula, who had slipped into the seat right next to him as she babbled on, sticking her tongue out at the tense atmosphere around her. She had also shown this kind of attitude back at the Library.

Shaula had pressed Subaru for a choice back at the Library; what was it that she had wanted Subaru to reply to her? As she referred to Subaru as her Master and completely idolized him, then how far would she go for him?

——How far would she obey him, if Subaru were to give her a command?

Julius: “We should stop arguing.”

Julius, with anguish etched across his handsome face broke the tense mood around them.

He placed his arm in front of Echidna and looked at Beatrice and Ram.

Julius: “Beatrice-sama, Miss Ram. As a member of her Camp, I deeply apologize for Echidna’s careless words. However, do not misunderstand what she meant to say. She did not make such a proposal with only rationalism in mind, with no other meaning to it.”

“Anastasia”: “Julius, stop. That speech was…”

[173] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “I would like to credit /u/WintryOne for basing my translation of Shaula's dialogue using their translation as the basis, which you can find here”.

Julius: “Emilia-sama’s camp may have lost the little girl that accompanied us here. That pain can be felt there. If possible, we should be more understanding in this situation.”

Hearing Julius’s sincere remarks, Echidna halted herself from speaking any further. Julius then turned to face Beatrice once again.

Julius: “For now, Anastasia-sama’s body has been pretty much taken over by Echidna’s Spirit. It is true that we cannot find a way to get Anastasia-sama back from her current state… but, there are other issues as well—— Echidna is, with every passing moment, consuming Anastasia-sama’s Od.”

Emilia: “Her Od… So, she’s always been burning her way through it? Has it always been like that, ever since Anastasia-san became unable to be woken up?”

Julius: “…Indeed. I imagine that is why she wants to hurry in borrowing the Sage’s wisdom by capturing this Tower.”

The rest of them reacted in shock at hearing Echidna’s secret being spoken out loud by Julius.

Having had her secret revealed by her own Camp member, Echidna shrugged her shoulders at the people staring at her.

“Anastasia”: “No point in trying to gloss over this. It is as Julius said. I, I do not think it a good idea, to consume so much of Ana’s Od like this, which really is notabundant in the first place. If I can, I want to return this body back to Ana as soon as possible.”

Emilia: “Even going as far as letting go of her human body, so you’re free?”

“Anastasia”: “Even if I can free Ana’s body, my own mind itself is being bound not of my own accord. I don’t know how much you will trust me with what I am saying, but…”

Echidna paused for a moment, and then resumed her speech.

“Anastasia”: “Essentially, one’s very vessel should contain its own being. Even if you just borrow the outer shell, if the insides do not come alongside, it will fall to tatters and become unnatural—— And that is just plain awful.”

Everyone: “——!!”

Casting her eyes down, Echidna's words had been relentless, as if cursing herself. Her story had struck Subaru's heart to its very core as he listened in casually.

If one just borrowed the outer shell, and the insides did not come with it—— that pierced+ his heart truly profoundly.

"Anastasia": "Anyways, that is why I want to hurry up and capture this Tower. By all means, if you do not believe what I have said, you can let someone like Beatrice poke around this body just to make sure. I suppose she will immediately notice how distorted I am as a Spirit, and how much Od I have consumed."

Echidna entrusted onto others the proof of her own situation without noticing the turmoil brimming inside of Subaru, brought upon him by her words.

In fact, after being nominated, Beatrice took Echidna's arm and probed into what in principle was her body; it seemed like Echidna's words were proven to be true. And, receiving that result——

Emilia: "…Okay. I understand the difficult circumstances that Echidna, and Anastasia-san, are in. It's no wonder you want to hurry up and climb all the way up to the top of the Tower…"

"Anastasia": "I do not know if this will bring you peace of mind, but if it is as is said, and the Sage in this Tower is omniscient, possessing esoteric wisdoms, then it is possible that they may also know the whereabouts of where the little girl disappeared. When putting it this way, I really do know how unfair it is, but…"

Emilia: "No no, thank you. It's better than having no hope left at all—— You're also looking out for me, and Meili too, aren't you?"

"Anastasia": "Hmm. Maybe. Or maybe it is just that mine, and Ana's body, is far too cute?"

Echidna, her face showing traces of awkwardness, turned away from Emilia who seemed prepared to accept her claim.

Emilia narrowed her amethyst eyes seeing Echidna react like this. Taking a deep breath, she once again spoke.

Emilia: “I’m reaaally worried about Meili. But, I also get Echidna’s point. So, starting from tomorrow again, let’s do our best to try and get to the top of the Tower. Of course, I will keep looking for Meili as much as I possibly can, but…”

Julius: “Remember to not neglect the importance of capturing the Tower, Emilia-sama.”

Emilia: “I know—— sometimes, you’ve gotta think on your own about what’s important.”

Putting her hand on her cheek, Emilia chastised herself, a firm resolve growing deep in her irises.

Turning back, she looked towards Subaru, who had been observing the exchange much like a spectator would. For a moment, the intensity in her gaze overpowered him, but the words Emilia continued with did not scathe into him.

Emilia: “Is that okay with you too, Subaru?”

Subaru: “I-I guess that’s okay. That way Meili can also rest in peace… No, I guess we all need to move forward… No, no that… Uh, why are you asking me?”

Emilia: “Because Subaru read Meili’s Book, mhm? Subaru’s reaction immediately after reading it… that’s why I think the one who’s the most worried about Meili should be Subaru.”

Emilia reminded him about it. Hearing her words, Subaru held his breath.

Those directing their gazes at him was not limited to just Emilia. Beatrice, Ram, Echidna and Julius, everyone was looking at Subaru.

What sort of intention was present in those gazes? He could not hazard a guess.

Without even realizing it, Subaru moved his lips in accordance to the treacherous spirit inside him.

Subaru: “——I’m definitely worried. But, I think Meili also would have wanted us to go on.”

Perhaps, just so he could utter the most superficial words in the world.

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——Late at night, Subaru sprung himself into action, finally having the time to act freely without anyone interfering.

Subaru: "————"

After the group had resolved to wrack each other's brains for ideas on how to capture the Second Floor, and after having established a firm plan for tomorrow, the meeting at the dinner table ended. They then proceeded to get ready for bed.

It was the night of a day in which unforeseen problems had occurred to one of their companions.

Naturally, they had recommended that they put all their bedding together in one room and sleep together. So, more or less, they had all gathered in one room, and created an improvised partition across the room using a blanket to act as a curtain between the male and female sides.

However, Subaru had been the sole person to insist on sleeping inside the Spirit room.

The aftereffects from reading the Book of the Dead had been the bigger part of his excuse.

In fact, having witnessed how abnormal Subaru had become after reading the Book of the Dead, no one had tried to argue with him. Of course, Beatrice had shown particularly strong disapproval at letting Subaru sleep alone, but the Spirit room had a fixed capacity limit.

Feeling sick with worry, Beatrice had to withdraw her opposition, yielding to Subaru's trembling voice.

Rather than it being a boon of Subaru's acting prowess, it had likely been his awfully pale face that had influenced them.

Honestly, it was a miracle that he had not collapsed; he was aware that he was in a terrible state.

Meili: "I think Meili also would have wanted us to go on—— What an actor you are, eeeh~?"

Subaru: "————"

Meili: "Fufu, don't get mad nooow~. It isn't sarcasm. I truly think that, and I commend you for iiit~."

He had thought she had been surprisingly quiet during the meeting at the dinner table. He wondered if she had something to do with the barefaced lie he had told at the end.

Even if he refused to listen to this troublesome hallucination, blocking his ears to her voice would be of no effect. That sweet voice would continue to cause him discomfort just like the sound of scratching a chalkboard with nails.

Meili: “Hmm~, so, tonight you’re not going to take care of the blue-haired onee-san’s head?”

Subaru: “————”

Her shade kept repeatedly hinting to Subaru, who had waited for the evening to grow dark to take action, about the existence of the sleeping beauty in the room.

To the shade’s temptation, identical to the one from several hours ago, Subaru’s answer remained the same as before.

Subaru: “It’s not her turn yet.”

Saying that, Subaru left the room without even looking at the sleeping beauty’s face.

At that moment, his eyes locked with Patrasche’s, who had slightly opened her eyes. He handled the situation by bringing his finger to his lips, shushing her, a gesture that indicated to her to keep it a secret.

He did not know to what extent the intention had been transmitted to his reptilian companion, but at the same time it felt like Patrasche was cleverer than creatures like dogs or horses. Whether or not she was, it would be nice if she remained silent.

Subaru: “————”

After ensuring he had made it so he ended up being left alone, the reason why Subaru started to move in the dead of night—— was not to take the lives of his sleeping companions and to put the Book of the Dead Plan into practice.

Of course, he had carefully considered that scheme too. With Subaru’s abilities, it would be best for that plan to be realized with surprise attacks, and one could say that during their sleep would be the best opportunity.

However, it was still too early. It was a last resort, a deed that went against humanity, that he should not perform unless they forced his hand.

Then, for what purpose had Subaru started acting in the dead of night? It was because of——

Meili: "——My corpse, what are you going to do about it?"

Realizing where Subaru was going, the voice of the little girl, as if standing behind him, posed him that question.

Subaru did not direct her a response, but, the direction he was walking towards was just as good as a confirmation to her question.

——Subaru was acting to dispose of Meili's still-hidden corpse.

Subaru: "————"

Whether this could be dubbed as a ridiculous story or a lucky situation or whatever, in any case, he had no other choice.

That today, Emilia and the others had not found Meili's remains should be called nothing more than a devil's plot, rather than God's plan.

Thinking back on it, in regards to this abrupt situation, his cover-up was full of holes that were plain to see, to the point that he wanted to curse himself for his own dim-wittedness.

Unexpected as it was, she had not been found. That had saved him. However, from tomorrow, while committing themselves to capturing the Tower, it would be no strange thing if they were to find by chance something that had slipped by them.

At least, he expected Emilia not to abandon searching for Meili.

Seeing that she was a girl without any troubles of her own, her heart would not give in until the situation was resolved. It was easy to imagine that she would restart her search for the little girl that had vanished.

Therefore, it was necessary for Subaru to have peace of mind.

If he could not have peace of mind, he would not be able to lay the groundwork for his success. Unless he prepared the foundations, he would not be able to build his castle on top of it, in the future. If the foundations could not be built, he would not be able to achieve his future.

To Natsuki Subaru's peace, the existence of Meili Portroute was an obstacle.

Meili: "I guess it kind of feels like you're being… even more restless now inside your heeead~."

He turned a deaf ear to her. She had just made her affirmation clear, she would get in his way. He firmly refused to allow that to come to pass.

As Subaru travelled stealthily through the night, making sure not to draw any attention to himself, he arrived at the room where he had hidden Meili's corpse.

Although the rooms in this area all looked the same, discoloration in the stone wall near the entrance of this one could be seen, making it so that the room was easy to identify via this landmark.

Subaru: "Honestly, this is going to leave a bad aftertaste…"

Taking her out from the Tower's entrance into the desert, and burying her in the sand would be for the best.

She would continue to decay if left for a few more days inside the building. And although the temperature was not too high or too low, a body, after its biological functions had ceased, could not be expected to avoid decomposition.

Indeed, if he wanted to never have to see it again, the best would be to do bring it far away from the Tower, as much of a pain as it would be, and turn her into chow for the Witchbeasts prowling about outside.

However, he imagined how that would weigh on his heart. No matter what, it was an impossible decision.

Subaru: "————"

At the back of the dim room, was enshrined a square lump of rock. On the opposite side of it, her corpse was hidden.

It was an awfully childish manner of hiding, it was not possible to overlook if looked at consciously. While feeling pathetic at losing his head, Subaru went around to the other side of the stone.

There, Meili's approximately half a day old remains——

Subaru: "——Huh?"

Without thinking, his voice leaked out.

His head renounced grasping the view before him.

On the other side of that stone, was absolutely nothing.

At the very least, he had made arrangements for the little girl's corpse, closing her eyes, crossing her arms together on top of her chest. The bruises adorning her pale neck, even the corpse of the poor little girl, they were nowhere to be found.

Subaru: "Why… I was sure, I left it here…"

It was supposed to be here.

He could not have possibly mistaken the room. He had not made such a fundamental mistake when coming here.

He had not. So, if he had not, where was the dead body which had to be here?

——Where had Meili Portroute's remains disappeared to?

???: "——What are you sneaking about to search for this late at night, Barusu?"

Subaru: "——Hk!?"

Astounded, the voice coming from behind him made his body go stiff, and Subaru fearfully turned around.

Paling, within Subaru's field of vision, at the entrance of the not so small room, stood a single silhouette.

Bobbed pink hair, sharp, light pink irises; with crossed arms, her imposing yet lovely features staring in his direction with coldness.

With that out-of-place feeling in her chest, while staring at the petrified Subaru, the girl—— Ram, gazed at his eyes and with an absolutely cold tone of voice said,

Ram: “Or I guess I should call you a fake. A worthless excuse of a Barusu—— of Natsuki Subaru.”

Arc 6 Chapter 50 - ——To You, the Absolutely Worthless Excuse

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 5 “Murder Is a Habit”, Parts 4 (half-way)-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, PaperLightning) — Complete

At the sound of her cold voice, Subaru literally felt his heart freeze.

Subaru: “————”

Looking back at the front of the room, Ram stood still at the entrance, her light pink irises ablaze, quietly boring into Subaru.

Though Subaru had only came in contact with her a few times before, he had rarely ever seen her reveal such emotion on her face—— in that Ram, there was a fervor that easily betrayed that impression.

Subaru: “Nh, uh…”

Ram: “What are you getting so flustered for? Ram asked you a question. Answering is Barusu’s… No, answering is your duty[174].”

Subaru: “I-I am, just…”

Ram: “Just?”

Promptly, Subaru’s head began revolving as he attempted to explain himself.

[174] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Ram switches from calling him Barusu to using «anata» (あなた) instead”.

He needed to move his tongue somehow, curse his sluggish mind for its initial response and meet this situation with a silver tongue.

However, in the first place, in addition to having been thrown into this unexpected turmoil, before this had occurred, Subaru had not—— he had yet to even process how Meili's corpse had disappeared.

He had not even prepared the words to talk his way out of things, he was not even able to prepare to come to grips to what was happening right before his eyes.

All that Subaru was able to do, was to open and shut his mouth awkwardly as he tried his best to not to say anything improper.

Even though Subaru's manner now supported his suspicious behavior louder than any words could.

Subaru: "————"

Ram narrowed her eyes at Subaru's silence. The coldness in her gaze, which he had already thought to be at the level of absolute zero, fell even further. It almost felt as if he had been assailed by a sharp, bone-chilling blizzard.

While desperately trying to keep his knees from trembling, Subaru slowly started to understand, too little too late.

——Had he been set up?

When Meili's body had not been found, the meeting at the dinner table had been a bluff.

When they had reported that Meili's body had not been discovered, Subaru had been relieved that he had escaped from a chance of being blamed.

Desperately searching in vain, they had not uncovered the not-so-well-hidden body of the little girl. His bad luck had prevailed even in these unnatural circumstances, Subaru had accepted the convenient truth, putting off any niggling doubts that had concerned him then.

And that had resulted in him being caught up in this uncouth act.

Hadn't Subaru also repeatedly seen this in various TV shows?

In the final scene, the murderer who had so meticulously put together his perfect plan, would return to the crime scene and give himself away as the police and the detectives would be closely watching the crime scene. And because of that, they would give away that they had committed the crime by showing themselves as being the smoking gun. That kind of comedic-ish moment.

Somewhere in his mind, Subaru had thought that, were he in that position, he would never show such stupidity.

Any connoisseur of mysteries would take note of the sheer foolishness of the dumb criminal that would slip up at the very end.

He had acted completely the same way—— rather, he had been worse, for his shock of being caught up in this act had made him quite a miserable sight to behold.

Ram: "——Fake."

Ram's quiet mutter barrelled into him as he was stricken by his own defective actions.

With just that single word, Subaru's brittle heart crumbled and sunk in his chest, as if he had been shell-shocked by a mortar attack. As soon as he had heard it, his face had turned as white as a sheet, his lips trembling. Ram let out a sigh.

Ram: "So, you have nothing to say to defend yourself. I guess that is proof that even you yourself, were aware of just how botched your acting is. You did not prepare well enough when disguising yourself as him. There are limits when it comes to not being diligent, don't you agree?"

Without hiding the contempt in her voice, Ram began explaining why she had suspected Subaru.

Fakeness, poor acting, and showing insufficient understanding towards "Natsuki Subaru" had all been pointed out by her. Not only was Subaru lost for words, but his heart felt as if it was going to crack, and the flow of his blood ached with each heartbeat.

In fact, Subaru bit his lower lip, and blood started to stream out, accompanied by a sharp stinging pain.

A fake, fake, fake, fake, fake, fake, fake, fake, fake, fake, fake——

A poor imitation of "Natsuki Subaru", a fake——

That thought settled into the pit of his stomach as if it were thick, black sludge.

A disgusting sludge covering him from head-to-toe; a weight that caused his knees to stop trembling. Instead, where the depths of his eyes had burned a blaze glowed, dancing atop the fuse of his dark emotions.

One could call it hostility, malice, malintent—— or perhaps an intent to kill.

Ram: “There is no way such unnatural behavior would go unnoticed, well, except for those that cannot spare the heed for it. That could be said of Julius, Anastasia-sama… well, Echidna.”

Subaru: “…You’re sure letting it all out. Here I am, listening to you patiently without even saying a word.”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “A fake!? I think you’re crossing the line of false accusations here. Who the hell do you think you are!?”

Ram: “False accusations, huh?”

Subaru tried to voice his objections, painful as it was, in response to Ram’s unwithering sharp tongue.

Of course, the point she made had been completely correct. Even if he did not agree with having been sternly described by her as that “worthless excuse”, that unfillable void between Subaru and “Natsuki Subaru” existed.

However, she could not have noticed this. If she came to notice it, then it would become impossible for him to worm himself out of this situation.

He could not stop here, halfway through——

Subaru: “False accusations upon false accusations. My ears are deaf to them, y’know, I can’t hear any of ‘em.”

Shoulders shrugging and cheeks distorting into a scowl, Subaru spoke while glaring at Ram.

As if he were dramatizing truth and lies, which even he himself felt as to be so brazen, to be the truth of the world.

Subaru: “Anyways, what’s with going on about me having wanted to wander about in the middle of the night. I just wanted to stretch my legs and think a bit while there was no one around. That’s why I deliberately went somewhere where I wouldn’t be around your little sister’s… Rem’s sleeping, nor Patrasche’s presence…”

Ram: “——Did you really think that nobody had seen anything?”

Ram had quietly asked Subaru this as he was rapidly blurting out his excuses.

Her words were brief, but sharp, designed to puncture deep into his vitals.

Subaru: “————”

Holding his breath at hearing her inquiry, Subaru racked his brain, trying to figure out what she had really meant with those words.

See, seen, not be seen, couldn’t have seen.

——Where did Ram get this word from, “see”. What does she mean by this?

Meili’s corpse? Or perhaps Meili, before she had become a corpse? Or had she seen him working on concealing Meili’s corpse? Or maybe——

Ram: “Nothing… even if it was your plan that nobody would see anything, the ground dragon was diligently watching your strange behavior. And because of that, Ram was also able to «watch you» in the same way.”

Putting a finger to her lips, right in front of him, Ram deliberately made a scene out of showing this particularly uncouth gesture towards Subaru.

Subaru: “…What the hell are you saying!?”

Without understanding the meaning of the behavior behind her gesture, Subaru let out these words in bewilderment.

However, he did have quite a recent memory of this particular gesture. It was none other than the gesture Subaru had shown to Patrasche before leaving the Spirit room.

Right now, he could not for the life of him understand why it had cropped up again in this place with Ram right now——

Ram: "You need to study him more, you «worthless excuse»——"

The utter disappointment those two words carried, was what drove home that this was a final warning for Subaru.

Subaru: "————"

Up until now, though extremely cold and unfeeling, Ram had kept her stance of wanting to talk, even if her intention of exchanging words with Subaru was disappearing by the second.

The instant Subaru had seen the look in her eyes, he realized that his excuses were meaningless.

Ram would turn a deaf ear to whatever excuses Subaru came up with.

Since it had come to this, Subaru had no other choice but to break through this situation using brute strength.

——In that moment, Subaru began considering how to kill Ram inside his head.

Subaru: "————"

Think about how to kill her. There was no longer any point in feeling reluctant about it.

He had already killed one person. One or two, it made little difference. *A while ago, "I" had a lot of experience in snatching away the lives of a great number of people.*

From here on out, there would be no hindrance in the execution of his Book of the Dead Plan.

Meili: "——Buuut~, that onee-san… "

Countless choices within Subaru crumbled away noisily. On the verge of being left with only his dangerous thoughts, the shade of the little girl that had been keeping silent up until now chimed in.

Though invisible, the presence of the shade beside him was so strong he could practically feel her breathing. It hugged Subaru's body from behind, softly whispering into his ear and tempting him.

And the contents of that sweet, sweet, saccharine temptation were——

Meili: "——Surely she's in a poor condition, riiight~? Her center of gravity on the left side, its balance is poooor~."

Those sweet whispers had brought him the weaknesses of that awe-inspiring, yet terrifying girl—— putting things short, she had given him instructions on how to kill her.

She was smaller than him, she was weaker than him, she had less experience when it came to killing.

With the knowledge "I" had accumulated by spending so much time with the assassin in black, it should be easy to kill this woman.

Meili: "Knock her over towards her left-hand side, and bash her head against the wall. That'll do the triiick~."

As he was taking into account the difference in strength between himself and Ram, relevant advice came from "*myself*".

By just following that, the girl's skull would crack, and flowers of deep crimson would bloom upon the wall.

Crimson flowers that would marvelously complement this lovely young girl's pink hair——

Subaru: "——Hk!"

Without any cues, and without any obvious openings, Subaru faced his opponent in the blink of an eye, and stepped forward.

Receiving a round of cheers from the shade, Subaru stepped forwards, devoid of hesitation, towards Ram's body which was slightly tensed. Towards her right-hand side.

He would throw her body against the wall, and then——

Ram: “Since you are lost for words, you are now resorting to violence. What a barbaric, tedious conclusion.”

In that moment of offense and defense, before Subaru’s arm could reach her, Ram had opened her lips and weaved these words.

Meeting each other’s gazes, Subaru’s breath was knocked out of him upon seeing Ram’s cold eyes.

Ram: “——Did you really think that the oh-so-frail and feeble Ram would challenge such a barbaric man alone?”

Rather than mocking him, Ram’s words felt similar to pity. As she spoke, Subaru heard a crackling sound in the air mingling in with her voice.

In fact, he was not hearing things. The moisture in the atmosphere was frozen in a flash, the air around him was being forcibly changed from gas to solid.

Subaru: “Wh… Hk.”

That crackling sound he had perceived, had been caused from Subaru’s own foot stepping against the pile of ice rising at his feet; it had stopped him in his tracks, causing him pain.

Subaru: “I-ice…!?”

Ricocheting from the hard, cold impact, Subaru could hardly believe his eyes.

But, the transformation did not just stop here. Bars of ice were not just materializing where his foot had been, rather, they rose from all around him—— enclosing him, materializing into an ice cage.

Subaru: “You’re kidding me… Hk. What the, magic…!?”

In the blink of an eye, the ice cage finished appearing in reality, within it, was Subaru completely trapped.

Seizing the bars of frost with his hands, Subaru attempted to violently shake them in an attempt to break that prison; however, his efforts only resulted in him being astounded at the strength of the ice. The

bars did not yield even an inch. Even if he kicked and punched with all his strength, he did not at all believe it possible for him to be able to break through.

And thus, Subaru had been imprisoned within that ice cage——

???: "——Everything would have been so much better if Ram had been wrong about this…"

Looking at him with sad amethyst eyes, Emilia came into view from behind Ram.

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What had happened was hardly surprising; Subaru found himself dumbstruck like a monkey inside a cage.

Subaru: "————"

Ram and Emilia had banded together to restrain him, that much was obvious.

Unlike Subaru, however, they had the option of cooperating with each other. The conditions for them were different than his, being forced to fight on his lonesome.

From the very beginning, the choice of trying to go against a dangerous person alone would not have cropped up for them.

Ultimately, Subaru had definitely been dancing in the palm of their hands at every step of the way.

Ram: "In this scene, you won't be able to aggrandize yourself with frivolousness, never mind chattering away with your unproven twaddle. I can barely say that you are below third-rate as an actor, let alone second-rate."

Ram spat this out, crossing her arms and looking at Subaru sitting in the cage.

Looking at her, he noticed that she had not even moved a single step away from the place where she had first made her entry. Even worse, she had not even changed her posture.

Between her and Subaru, that was what differed between the two actors, it was.

Ram: “With such acting, only a seriously oblivious person could be fooled. Then, who the most mentally tough person was amongst everyone, you needn’t even consider there.”

Emilia: “From the way you’re speaking… aren’t you praising me? Thanks.”

Ram: “…You are welcome.”

Next to Ram who had reacted with a faint air of bitterness, silver hair flew up as Emilia stepped forward.

Judging by what Ram had stated, this ice cage had been fashioned by Emilia—— in other words, it could be concluded that this was a kind of magic she was able to use.

Had he not been stuck in this situation, Subaru would have definitely been impressed by her enchanting ice magic which suited its owner’s beautiful, mystical face quite well.

But, seeing that he was practically a captive in the ice cage, and witnessing just how strong it was, at a glance he could understand the difference in strength between him and her, and just how inferior he was.

The difficulty level of executing his Book of the Dead Plan, that ranking had now greatly changed. But, before that——

Emilia: “——Subaru, what were you trying to do at this time? Weren’t you supposed to be resting in the room?”

Subaru: “That’s…”

Looking worried, Emilia asked Subaru what he had been doing here at this time.

A serious look of anxiety dwelled in her eyes, but, when it came to this situation, the only possible conclusion for what he could think of it was that it was simple honesty that practically almost classified as stupidity. She was mistaken, thinking that there was a logical reason behind everything.

Even Subaru had his own say about this.

A reason as to how he had ended up like this certainly existed. However, telling them would be like grasping at thin air; who on earth would believe Subaru’s words?

Ram: “Emilia-sama, it is pointless to ask him that. I doubt he will answer your question honestly. I am doubtful in handling it as if it were Barusu.”

Emilia: “But, Subaru is Subaru! Ram, you must understand that, right?”

Ram: “Just a counterfeit with merely a similar appearance… that is how Ram judges it.”

If anything, it resembled something closer to one of Subaru’s own thoughts about himself; Ram rebuked Emilia’s notion.

Most likely, it had been Ram who had suspected Subaru and had also proposed to keep an eye on what he would get up to at night. For sure, Emilia must have been standing by as the rear-guard, brought along in the case of an emergency.

In other words, the answer to dealing with the “Natsuki Subaru” who was not Subaru had already been noticed by Ram a while ago.

And afterward, everything left was to take the steps to confirm both the fact and the accompanying grievances.

Ram: “Thanks to Emilia-sama, you were captured without any harm done. I wonder if a bit of pain will make you willing to tell Ram and everyone what we want to hear?”

Subaru: “Pain… like torture me? Isn’t it a well-known thing that that’s not only extremely sadistic, but needs sophisticated knowledge!!”

Ram: “I will do what is necessary. Besides, I do not really like inflicting pain on others—— but, it is a specialty of mine.”

Keeping him in a cage with a space of not even two meters square, Ram was not going easy on Subaru.

Pale and slender though her fingers may be, her humble claim of “inflicting pain is my specialty” felt frightfully convincing to Subaru.

If he kept going like this, without doing anything, if the opportunity to launch a counterattack did not present itself, it would end up becoming a case where no matter how hard she searched for his secrets,he would just be meaninglessly confessing his miserable behavior.

Emilia: “——Wait. You can’t hurt him. I won’t let you do that.”

However, Emilia, who herself had imprisoned Subaru in the ice cage, was the one to stop Ram before she could resort to extreme measures.

She turned her back on the cage Subaru was in and faced Ram directly.

Ram: “…Emilia-sama, weren’t you supporting Ram?”

Emilia: “I endorsed your opinion of questioning him because I also felt that Subaru was acting strange. But it’s because I thought this might happen… that I decided to stay here.”

Ram: “It’s because I did not want something like this to happen that I asked Beatrice to keep Julius and the rest company. And yet, I did not think Emilia-sama would be so, disobedient… Too naive.”

Without hiding her irritation at the difference in their opinions, Ram pointed at Subaru, who was hiding behind Emilia’s back. Regarding them, she uttered the biting words “Is this okay?”.

Ram: “He is too lacking in the points that the original Barusu should obviously be in possession of. I heard you talk about the Watergate City… Pristella. It seemed like there you had met a shape-shifting Sin Archbishop.”

Emilia “…Yes. A reason for us coming here was to restore the people who that Sin Archbishop changed into a different form.”

Ram: “Then what are the chances that Sin Archbishop could have become any of us?”

Emilia: “————”

Ram: “Even if they are not that specific Sin Archbishop, if they are able to freely change their shape then we cannot go by outward appearances. Their normal conduct, the feeling when they try to talk, if all of those things are different…”

Ram responded with logic while holding back her anger towards Emilia’s emotion-driven opposition.

Those were nothing but deductions and baseless accusations towards Subaru, but there was no basis to deny them.

And no less important than that, Subaru—— no, "*I*" felt revulsed by the topic at hand.

Subaru: "——Hk."

A flashback, white memories.

They came not from Natsuki Subaru, but from a small fragment of the memories seen in the Book of the Dead. The memories from when "*I*" was "*me*".

——Training, that was what they called their actions towards "me".

Even though dread had been carved into me many times, the most terrifying thing to happen to me, was when my body was made to change into countless innumerable "frogs".

Even though my consciousness existed only in one body, my infinitely fragmented consciousness did as it liked, leaping whenever it wanted, running wherever it wanted.

Dreading the thought of not being able to go back to my original self, brought the realization that I had forgotten what my "original self" was in the first place. Having my reason for existence as a living being crash like that, I was thankful from the bottom of my heart to Mother the moment I was returned to normal.

And at the same time, the notion that I should never, under any circumstances, go against her orders was etched into my soul.

Subaru: "——Uh."

Recalling that dread directly, almost as if he had personally lived it, Subaru's field of vision blurred.

One's own appearance was something that was directly linked to one's identity and sense of self. Tampering and changing that as one liked on a whim, that could only be called blasphemy to one's existence.

The most detestable deed of all——

Emilia: "That's too extreme, this is quite unlike you Ram! You sound like you're forcing me to contain him!"

Ram: “Can you even say nothing’s up? Before that man behind us…”

Emilia and Ram continued their arguing while Subaru alone drowned in anguish, feeling like his stomach was churning.

However, Ram’s claim was like *probatio diabolica*[175]. You could prove that something was something, but no one could prove that it was not.

This Natsuki Subaru was not the “Natsuki Subaru” they wanted.

To explain that theory, some kind of shape-shifting power was helpful. It made it simple—— and at the same time, it was unbearable for the current Subaru, from the bottom of his heart.

Overwhelmed by the hostile emotions inside him, Subaru wheezed in pain.

Ram: “I need to make him spit it out, right now! So I can know where Meili and the real Barusu are.”

Subaru: “——Ah?”

That complaint from Ram, like a surprise attack, overloaded Subaru’s consciousness.

It was a bolt out of the blue, a truly unexpected comment.

Subaru: “————”

Raising his face, Subaru looked at Emilia and Ram, at their continuing quarrel. Gazing at her back, he was unable to see Emilia’s emotions; however, Ram’s face was clearly visible to him.

Her eyes, burning with rage, contained no schemes that would snare Subaru into lies right here. At least, what she had just stated was what she had really meant.

In other words, this meant that Ram and the others had not uncovered Meili’s remains.

[175] “*Probatio diabolica*”, or “devil’s proof”, is a logical dilemma that states that while evidence may prove the existence of something, the lack of evidence does not disprove said existence. In other words, lack of proof to something not existing means a statement is true in a way. For more information, see here.

The only thing that was lying in wait, in trying to denounce Subaru right here, was his suspicious behavior, since he could not, at all, try as he might, play the part of “Natsuki Subaru”.

He understood where the confused Ram’s questioning was coming from. But at the same time, he did not understand.

Had it not been Ram or Emilia, who had been the one to move Meili’s remains?

If it had been neither Ram, nor the others, nor Subaru, then there was another agenda at work——

Emilia: “Real or fake, you can’t just decide like that! I mean, the Subaru that is here right now is…”

Subaru: “——I have, amnesia!!”

Ram: “Huh…?”

Holding onto the bars of the ice cage, Subaru’s scream cut into the duo’s quarrel.

Hearing that screaming voice, Ram appeared taken aback and confused. That one unexpected angle of attack left Ram’s mind blank.

Had it been a trick, employed to poke gaps between her logic and disturb her thoughts, then it had been a success. But there had been no such intent, this had been Subaru’s scream of truth.

Ram: “——Tch.”

As for why he had cried this out right at this moment, even Subaru himself had no clue.

In this loop, Subaru had hidden the fact that he had lost his memories, and had tried to imitate how the old “Natsuki Subaru” had seemed. Thanks to that, his life had not been snatched away this loop.

And though that had not come to pass, hadn’t there been some other alarming situations that perhaps even rivalled that, which had toyed with Natsuki Subaru and chased him about, one after the other?

But in truth, concealing his amnesia had complicated everything else in this loop.

So, what would happen now, after his grand reveal?

Ram: “After all this time, you are still playing around like that…!?”

In reality, the moment her stagnating thoughts had resumed their activities, Ram’s expression became dyed in anger.

The girl probably thought that Subaru’s desperate cry now was a desperate lie—— that it was nothing more than sheer nonsense. But even if that was how it was for Ram——

Emilia: “Ram! Listen to what Subaru is saying! There was a reason after all!”

Ram: “Are you serious, Emilia-sama!? That was completely unbelievable…!”

With arms stretched, Emilia stood in front of Ram, rallying with Subaru’s words. Had she believed he had only jumped up to take advantage using this absurd excuse, Subaru may as well give up on continuing to speak.

However, standing in opposition to Ram, who wished to reject it completely, Emilia still faced her with resolve,

Emilia: “It’s worth believing him! Didn’t we all up until now!?”

Ram: “——Tsk.”

Ram’s cheek slightly stiffened at Emilia’s appeal.

For a second, a trace of doubt flitted through Ram’s light-pink irises, various thoughts seeming to spin through Ram’s intelligent head. She started to open her stiffly closed lips, and,

Emilia: “Ram, let’s listen to Subaru and…”

Ram: “——What about Rem?”

Emilia: “——Ah.”

In an instant, the petite form of Ram, her eyes closed and moist, spun around and leapt at Emilia.

Deciding in that moment to fall back, Emilia had prepared herself to hold down Ram. But, the approaching Ram’s movements proved to be faster, and Emilia’s left hand was caught by Ram’s right.

Ram: “Don’t get in my way now!”

Emilia: “Kyaa!”

As she spoke, demonstrating her excellent footwork and defensive movements, and minimally moving her wrist and shoulder, Ram flung Emilia’s body aside, in a manner that had demonstrated maximum effectiveness.

As Emilia was launched away, her figure slowly somersaulted to the side. Through her surprise at her world’s sudden revolutions, she quickly grasped her situation and attempted to swing her long legs onto the floor below.

Emilia: “——Hk.”

In the spot where Emilia landed, lay one of Ram’s shoes, having been taken off. Tripping over it, Emilia lost her balance and landed on all fours.

In that melee, Emilia had been overwhelmed by Ram’s technique, and Ram slipped into the gap created. Thrusting her wand between the bars of the ice cage, towards the tip of the frightened Subaru’s nose,

Ram: “I dare you to say that again.”

Subaru: “It’s, not like that…”

Ram: “With that face. And that voice. Say that you forgot Rem. One more time…”

Gritting her teeth, Ram was collecting something on the tip of her trembling wand, and he knew what it was.

It was invisible to the eye, a power which would probably be called Mana was accumulating in front of his eyes, but even then, Subaru could not follow with any words.

He could not think of words to present Ram with, to that girl in front of him hanging on the verge of tears.

It was not with Natsuki Subaru, but would it have been possible for “Natsuki Subaru” to do it?

Emilia: “You can’t, Ram! Stop!!”

Emilia, having just clambered back to her feet, screamed in an attempt to stop Ram.

However, she did not make it in time.

Emilia: “————”

A white light blinked through the ice cage’s bars, and the shock engulfed Subaru.

That shock flung his body all the way onto the ice bars behind him, and the back of his head banged against them.

Subaru: “——Uh.”

His head shook violently, and his consciousness became hazy.

Without even having time to explain himself, Natsuki Subaru’s consciousness slipped away.

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Subaru: “——Uh?”

Letting out a faint, weak groan, his consciousness began to resurface.

Gradually, gradually, his consciousness rose to the surface from the sludge of darkness. Feeling as if he were somewhere vast, steady, steadily accelerating, stretching into reality, and finally——

Subaru: “—Guaaaaaah!? Owww!?”

The instant in which he had been about to flit into consciousness, he was yanked up by a force that felt like it had seized him by the scruff of his neck. Sharp, hot pain burned within Subaru’s mind.

Groaning and writhing in pain, Subaru woke up on the cold, hard floor.

Subaru: “Ow, ow, owwww, what, what’s this…?”

His body roused by throbbing pain, Subaru reached out his hand to his left shoulder. The moment he touched it, scorching pain once again seared his mind. He could not move his left arm at all.

Subaru: “Did it get yanked out of my socket…? Is it dislocated? Ugh, never felt this one before…”

Dangling about, his arm down from his shoulder was unable to move as per his will. However, when he had tried to move and touch it, he had felt a sharp pain. Thus, Subaru stood up with great care.

He looked around at his surroundings. He saw that there was nobody around. And this room was——

Subaru “The room where I hid Meili…”

In other words, he was in the same room where he had been conscious up until just before.

As evidence for that, behind Subaru, the ice cage Emilia had magically crafted was still there. It was strange that Subaru had been lying down outside the cage. Looking at the cage, it did not appear to have been opened, and it did not seem like he should have been able to get out by any normal means——

Subaru: “——So does that mean my shoulder was…?”

Thinking to that degree, Subaru noticed the relationship between his dislocated shoulder and his escape from the ice cage.

The gaps between the bars of the ice cage were so small that it would be impossible to get through them unless he was the size of a child. By force, it should be possible to get through with his shoulder dislocated.

Question was, how had Natsuki Subaru managed that while unconscious? Also——

Subaru: “——Where have Emilia, and Ram gone?”

Within the room, the figures of the girls who had been arguing with each other not long ago, or even about to kill each other, were nowhere to be seen.

This situation was far too unnatural.

——No, it was more like a terrible situation than an unnatural one.

Subaru had been knocked out of consciousness, and thus knew nothing about his shoulder getting dislodged, nor of Emilia and Ram whereabouts, nor of anyone else who should have been here.

Looking around the room, Subaru wondered what had happened during his blackout, looking to see whether anything strange had occurred—— and there, he saw it.

“Natsuki Subaru was here”.

Subaru: “————”

On the walls, everywhere he could see, those words were engraved.

Cut into the stone wall, crudely shaped words were carved as if scribbled into a notepad.

Had it been the fragment of stone near the wall that had done that? It appeared to have been part of the stone in the back of the room, which had been originally used to hide Meili’s dead body.

Using that stone fragment, the phrase “Natsuki Subaru was here” had been engraved onto the wall—— Had it been just that, then the impact would not have been as great as when the same words had been carved into his arm.

Under the influence of the surprise and astonishment that the redux had brought along, he should have laughed it off as no big deal.

But, however——

“Natsuki Subaru was here”

“Natsuki Subaru was here” “Natsuki Subaru was here”

“Natsuki Subaru was here” “Natsuki Subaru was here” “Natsuki Subaru was here”

“Natsuki Subaru was here” “Natsuki Subaru was here” “Natsuki Subaru was here” “

here” “Natsuki Subaru was here”——

Subaru: “——Uh, ah.”

Tightly packed together, abnormally so, the words had been carved so that they completely covered the walls inside the room.

They had looked so natural that Subaru had not truly noticed the uncomfortable feeling he’d possessed from the start. The words had been so abnormally and stubbornly engraved to the extent they looked somewhat like an optical illusion, due to the excess of that pattern on the walls.

Inside this room, for what purpose, these characters had been engraved——

???: “—Hmm? Oy, the fuck’s up with this creepy ass room? The fuck’s this crap decoratin’ the walls, ya prick?”

Subaru: “————”

Shuddering, standing stock still, the voice coming from behind Subaru inspired fear.

It was not down to the fact that he had not detected its presence. After all, Subaru’s attention right now had been firmly fixed at the writing on the walls. He would not have noticed anyone approaching.

Thus, he was not surprised because of that.

Subaru’s surprise had come from how familiar that crude voice sounded. Its terrible memories that he wanted to forget——

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Norvak (source)

???: “Small fry, the hell ya doing lookin’ so blank, ya prick. What’s a small fry doin’ so far away from his flock? Aren’t’cha just askin’ to be a bigger fish’s prey?”

As he spoke from behind Subaru, who dared not to look back, the red-haired man’s laugh rang out like a shark’s.

Oh how he laughed indeed, that man who should, by all means, not be present.

Arc 6 Chapter 51 – Tower of the Living, PART 2

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 6 “Re: ZERO -Life Starts in Another World-”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (DiscountAnon/Nanashi-tan, GracedHarperd, Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

Hearing the voice of the familiar man from behind him, Subaru trembled in fear, to the point that he forgot to breathe.

Subaru: “————”

Right in that instant, he had even forgotten about the pain from his dislocated left shoulder.

His mind was dominated by a vast succession of negative emotions, such as fear and cowardice; a tempest of hopeless feelings clouded over his thoughts, a single word repeating inside his head: “Why?”.

Why, his list of questions was inexhaustible.

Why was his left shoulder dislocated? Why was the phrase “Natsuki Subaru was here” carved all around this room to this extent? Why were Emilia and Ram’s figures, who had captured Subaru, nowhere to be seen? Why was Meili’s body, which he had hidden, nowhere to be seen? Why had Natsuki Subaru lost his memories? Why had Natsuki Subaru been summoned into a different world? Why, couldn’t he ever tell his mom and dad the truth about everything? Why——

Man: “What’re ya doin’ all huddled up. Don’t be so silent, ya gross bastard, ya prick.”

——Why was the man who was not supposed to be able to come down standing here?

Man: “——Kh.”

Suddenly, irritation rose in that man’s voice, causing Subaru to whirl around in a panic.

To look directly at the figure behind him was a frightening notion. In most cases, what would trigger this sense of trepidation was a fear of the unknown; however, the fear that this man inspired came from more than just the immediate risk of looking.

This was far deeper than just unease from being unable to see, for this specific opponent's intent was not merely to inspire fear. Subaru could not help but think of it as something much closer to a straightforward urge to maim or even to kill.

Man: "Haa. What ya lookin' at, ya prick. With that face. Are ya that scared, ya prick!? Ya look like ya're about to cry, ya prick. Ya're a disgusting bastard in this fucked up room, ya prick."

Smiling sardonically at Subaru, who had made up his mind as such, the man dressed in a male kimono brazenly bared his white teeth.

Long, red hair, an eyepatch covering his right eye, his bare chest wrapped in a white *sarashi*, and a muscular, well-built body; he was looking down at the pitiful Subaru.

The guardian of the Second Floor of Pleiades Watchtower—— Reid was the man calling out to him.

Subaru: "————"

Reid: "…Does yer mouth not work, ya prick? Can't'cha hear me speak? Or, are ya tryin' to show that'cha got no plans of speakin' with me? If that's the way it is, I don't really mind, but still, I guess it feels more dignifyin' that way."

Bluntly saying this out loud, with words that show utmost arrogance, Reid stared at Subaru with an angry expression on his face. Whilst being overwhelmed by the hostility coming from Reid, Subaru forced his lips into a mumble.

Subaru: "Ri, ght… eye…"

Reid: "Haaah?"

Subaru: "Wasn't your eyepatch… on your left eye…? Why… is it on your right eye…?"

It was a question that he should not have uttered right now. As Subaru asked him, Reid's eyes flickered slightly. And just after, the man clanged his teeth together,

Reid: “Whim, it’s a whim! Either eye’s fine for me, ya prick. That’s the way it is, I put it on just when I feel like messin’ about. If I don’t put it on, I’ll end up seein’ way too much crap. It’s just that kind of thing.”

As Reid said that, he turned over the eyepatch covering his right eye using his fingers. And there below his eyepatch, were no wounds; his eye was in good health, exactly as he had stated.

And of course, there were no signs of injuries to his uncovered left eye. In short, his words had been completely true, he understood that his eyepatch was really only an item for doing something because he wanted to.

Even so, for him, it was a pastime needed for bridging the power-gap between himself and others——

Reid: “——What, ya prick. Oy, ain’t yer shoulder dislocated, I did think it looked a lil’ weird.”

Subaru: “——Kuh!?”

Immediately after he had felt such profound emotion, a burning sensation scorches the lining of Subaru’s brain, with a sudden impact.

Subaru: “Gi, gah…!”

His throat was constricted by sharp pain, and his field of view around him flickered, pierced by great anguish.

Regarding it with no consideration or hesitation, Reid had grasped Subaru’s dislocated shoulder with his right hand. With a mere twist of the wrist, he had casually inserted the dislocated bone back into its socket among the shoulder.

The dislodged bone had been fixed, echoing a dull click across the room, and freedom of movement returned to his left shoulder.

However, the pain that for a moment had become negligible returned to him, tears pouring down Subaru’s cheeks as the pain made him feel like cursing the world around him.

Reid: “Don’t’cha be actin’ so over the top, ya prick. It looks like I’m pickin’ on ya when ya look like that, damn it. As a matter of fact, it’s not me who’s bullyin’ ya, ya prick. More so it’s that smokin’ hottie!”

Subaru: “Smokin’, hottie?”

Reid: “That smokin’ hottie with the silver hair, ya prick. The ice cage behind’cha, I can pretty much tell by lookin’ at that, plus yer dislocated shoulder. Did’cha fall out with yer friends, hah, how amusing!”

Reid snorted this back at Subaru, the latter holding his left shoulder and groaning in pain. Having heard those words, Subaru understood he had referred to Emilia when talking about a “smokin’ hottie”.

And, at the same time, regarding what had happened in the room between Subaru and everyone else——Subaru feared that Reid’s observant eye must have grasped what happened.

Subaru: “How… do you know?”

Reid: “Stuck inside this depressin’ Tower, stuff between a man ‘n woman’ll either improve beyond imagination, or decline beyond imagination, those’re the only two options. When it comes to ya, yer the type to piss people off beyond belief. It’s not so hard to figure that one out.”

In all honestly, none of those conclusions were wrong. Therefore, Subaru had no way to refuse those words. Tearing his gaze away from Subaru, Reid turned to glance at Emilia’s ice cage.

Subaru: “————”

Twisting his neck, he strode huffily away from Subaru’s side, eyeing the ice cage for a moment before he stomped on it, applying force but for a brief moment.

In that instant, the structure gave a sharp cracking sound; in the next, the destructive force spread to the entirety of the resilient prison, shattering the lattice entirely.

Needless to say, no matter how hard Subaru had tried, he had not been able to shift that ice cage even slightly; the cage’s integrity had refused to yield.

Whether in terms of magic or strength, the disparity between them had been immediately revealed with a simple glance, leaving Subaru dumbstruck. Putting Subaru’s reaction to the side, Reid stretched his hands and feet lightly.

Reid: “——Well, looks like ya can move it again all right. Excellent, excellent indeed.”

Muttering that, making sure he had some kind of feeling there, he slowly stepped out from the room.

He took absolutely no notice of Subaru, who stood stock still, perplexed out of his mind by that attitude. The confusion had still not settled down, he was not able to completely grasp what had happened, but he knew that, in this place, taking his eyes away from Reid would result in nothing good.

First off——

Subaru: “Wait up! Didn’t you… didn’t you say you couldn’t come down from the Floor above? Why are you walking around this floor like it’s normal!?”

As Reid walked along the corridor of the Fourth Floor with complete indifference, Subaru rushed out of the room.

Quite unpretentiously, staring at Reid’s back as he gaited across the floor with an air of majesty, Subaru threw out the one question which had been inside his head since the very beginning.

In response, Reid waved his hand without looking behind him,

Reid: “When did I say I couldnt’ walk outta the Second Floor? If that’s what ya’re sayin’… then ain’t that a lil’ bit unfair? Don’t’cha worry. Yer assumption that I can’t leave has a bit o’ truth to it. I only became able to leave just now.”

Subaru: “Just now… Wait, so may I ask why the premise collapsed?”

Reid: “I ain’t gonna give ya a full lecture here ‘n explain everythin’. I can walk about. Ya’re about to piss yerself. That’s that, the end—— Ah, wait, it’s not the end yet.”

Following Reid in his wake, Subaru caught up to him. Changing the tone of his voice, Reid narrowed his eyes at him. Subaru’s body shrunk in place, as Reid distorted his cheeks at him; it looked like he could kill him with merely his sharp eyes.

The red-haired swordsman, who did not carry weapons along, unarmed—— With merely the glint in his eyes, this man’s gaze would be enough to put someone to the sword. And so, Subaru took a deep breath.

Subaru: “W-what the…”

Reid: “Excellent, keep blusterin’ on like that, ya prick. If ya can’t even do that, ya got no right to call yerself a man. ‘N so, I got a question for ya, ya borderline failed man. I’mma ‘bout to bid this depressin’ Tower farewell, but where the fuck did yer buddies ya fell out with run off to?”

Subaru: “Huh?”

As the hostility exuding from the man nearby squeezed his heart, this surprising remark fell upon Subaru’s ears, causing his eyes to widen. Seeing the disheveled Subaru’s reaction, Reid naturally continued with a “Ya prick”,

Reid: “I plan to get outta here, but I need food, water, and sake. Let’s not even talk about the women. Well, from yer friends, that smokin’ hottie and that sexy-lookin’ woman are certainly fine prospects. Though, since I’d feel guilty seducin’ the smokin’ hottie, the sexy woman’d gotta be the prime candidate for that.”

Subaru: “Leaving…? This Tower? But, what about… your Examination, no, what about everything else? What are you going to do about this situation, and everything that’s going on!?”

Reid: “Nothin’, everythin’ ya said ain’t got shit to do with me. Yer issues should be solved by yerself, I’ve got nothin’ to do with it. Ah, hol’ up. There’s one last disgustin’ task left.”

Subaru: “If it’s disgusting, leave it—— GAH!?”

As Subaru’s eyebrows had knitted into a grimace at those words, Reid’s facial expression suddenly changed, jabbing at Subaru’s forehead with his finger. Subaru’s back crashed against the wall of the corridor due to the sheer strength of the poke. Looking down at Subaru laying in a painful heap beneath him, Reid snorted out a “Hmph”.

Reid: “I already told’cha. Don’t’cha be thinkin’ you’ll be able t’ get an answer to everythin’, ya lil’ chicken. Are ya a small fry, or a lil’ chicken, tighten the grip under yer feet, ya prick.”

Subaru: “That’s a problem of your own definition…”

Reid: “Don’t use me, who so fortunately appeared before ya as a tool to dispel yer worries, questions, or regrets with. Yer issues’re for ya to solve. Don’t use me as a crutch.”

Subaru: “————”

Calling those words akin to something like irritated was not quite right.

Feelings of irritation had some emotion to them, but Reid did not care at all about Subaru’s existence. A person would not get emotional over someone you they did not care about. Thus, his voice was devoid of any irritation.

However, just these over-the-shoulder words were enough for Subaru to feel as if a knife had been stuck into his heart.

Groaning from that pain, once again the questions left behind were filling Subaru’s lurching mind, as if they were going to bury up his heart. But, just before that happened.

Reid: “——Ahhh, it came.”

Swiveling his head to look towards the end of the aisleway, Reid grumbled as if something was up.

Lifting his head, Subaru’s eyes were also lured towards that direction, pointing them at the place Reid was looking towards, but he was unable to spot anything different there. However, he realized it belatedly.

Crouched down, his buttocks against the floor, he took notice it.

A faint tremor. The Tower was quaking. Faintly, not quite on the same scale as an earthquake, but he felt tremors nevertheless.

Reid: “KAH.”

Clacking his teeth together and laughing, his eyes shining, Reid stepped forward, sandals firmly treading against the floor. Seeing his unhesitating manner from the corner of his eyes, Subaru panickily followed in his trail.

Reid had state that he should not use him as a tool to dispel his own worries.

It was undeniable, there was no doubt in Subaru that Reid’s words had cut right into his frail heart. Subaru’s issues could not be solved by merely complaining about them to Reid.

However, apart from that, Subaru now had a responsibility to get to the bottom of the reason for Reid meandering about the Fourth Floor, and for what was happening in the Tower in general.

Subaru: “Reid!”

Reid: “————”

Subaru: “Hey, wait up! Wait up! At the very least, tell me, what are you going to do…?”

With long strides, and a quick pace, Reid’s back was proudly advancing forward, and he did not deign to stop and answer Subaru’s question.

His shoulder was in pain, there was bewilderment and confusion in his heart, he possessed not any assertiveness. Subaru was being driven by his half-hearted obligation, he had no other choice but to chase with utmost effort after the back of the man treading forward.

And suddenly, the back of the man with the swaying long red-hair abruptly ground to a halt and stopped.

Reid: “————”

Reid had stopped his feet as he reached the spiral staircase present in the atrium at the end of the corridor—— the place where the amnesiac Natsuki Subaru had twice been pushed to his death.

As Subaru had been busy frantically chasing after Reid, he only noticed where he stood at the last second. He held his breath, frozen in place.

However, his desire of wanting to break the deadlock surpassed the feeling of avoiding this place that brought about his Death, and lent Subaru the strength to move forward.

——It was not the place that had killed Subaru. It was evil that had killed Subaru. It was not the place that ought to cause him to harbor these feelings of avoidance, rather, the main cause of this should be attributed to the culprit.

Subaru: “————”

The beating of his heart, and the sound of his blood flowing through his veins felt frightfully loud. Ignoring that, Subaru wiped off a bead of sweat and pushed on forwards towards where Reid had stopped.

Reid was standing at the edge of the drop, looking down below at the scene his eyes regarded. Wherever he might be, he was a man to whom the posture of looking down on things was quite suiting. Whilst thinking such a useless thought in the depths of his mind, Subaru followed his gaze.

Tracing his gaze, he finally noticed it.

Having been lost in his noisy heartbeat, a sound that he had not heard before, was now audible to him.

Subaru: "————"

——Right beneath him, at the bottom of the large staircase, having appeared out of nowhere onto the Fifth Floor, a repulsive herd of Witchbeasts of flame were now filling up the hall, presenting him with a spectacle of absolute hell.

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Witnessing this display from beyond even his wildest imaginations, Subaru's senses went completely white.

Subaru: "——Huh?"

The cracking of the scorching crimson flame and the sound of countless wailing infants dwelt in the Tower.

Connecting those two factors led to one and only conclusion—— that was, this terrifying Witchbeast, which wore a mane of flame around its neck, was only one part of a violent chaos of a horde.

Four legs and a torso akin to that of horses, an upper body with arms comparable to a human's, and a gaping maw complete with fangs spreading through the human half. The dreadful heat's flames were about to scorch and devour the oxygen within the Tower.

There were about twenty witchbeasts at this place, or thereabouts; he could witness them rampaging about below him on the Fifth Floor.

The dreadful heat reached from below towards Subaru and Reid, dozens and dozens of meters up-high. Flinching back, he was taken by surprise by this heatwave, to the extent that he felt like his eyeballs dry up in an instant.

What is, really, what is going on?

Reid: "So there's some creepy-ass Witchbeasts here, huh. Ya prick, do ya know what they are?"

Subaru: "…I don't know. It's the first time seeing Witchbeasts for me too, other than that huge earthworm… Ah!?"

Next to Subaru, who could keep his eyes off the scene, stood Reid looking at the exact same spectacle, issuing that question to him. Subaru shook his head at that query, his voice unintentionally trembling at the change in his view.

The Witchbeasts were rampaging about inside the Tower, garbed in flame—— looking like both horse and man, a more convenient term to call them by would be Centaurs. The Centaurs let out a piercing yell.

Coming out from their warped maws was a violent yell, a shrill roar as if caused by sheer fury. And the reason for that was the lone Knight who was fighting back, swinging his slender sword, weaving his way through the herd of Witchbeasts.

Centaur: "——KSHEEEEEEGHHH!"

Holding his breath, an elegant sword slipped through a gap in the herd of the Witchbeasts who carried swords of flame.

Blood scattered, the arms and legs of a Witchbeast were severed, its delayed shriek reverberated around the surroundings. While listening to this, the Knight who risked being overwhelmed by the amount of Centaurs sprung forward and leapt towards the next beast, sword poised. That was——

Subaru: "——JULIUS!"

Reflexively, Subaru's lips called out his name, deeply moved at having found a survivor.

He could not tell which emotion was stronger within himself, the one of joy or grief.

Nevertheless, immediately after his consciousness leapt he had done something unknown. There had been a situation like that once before, when he found himself with Meili's corpse beside him.

He was incapable of saying for sure that the next time he met with someone, they would end up as a corpse or not. There was always such a fear in him. Therefore, it was good news that he had broken through this fear.

Subaru: "————"

Putting aside the expression of surprise from above, beneath Subaru's eyes, Julius swung his sword and continued his melee against the Witchbeasts.

Although he was at a disadvantage in terms of numbers, it was a situation where the strength of one probably was not equal to that of Julius. Although, if the Witchbeasts which freely emitted flame thought of swarming Julius, possessing only a sword to fend off against them, would mean his limits would be called upon.

——And if he burnt to death, then his Book of The Dead should appear in the Library.

Reid: "Where are all the others? ——Well, guess this is convenient."

Subaru: "——Kh!"

In the moment a dark thought desiring for the death of his companion had floated across Subaru's mind, Reid's muttering, as he gazed at the scene below, jerked his thoughts back to reality.

But, Reid was unaware of Subaru's internal conflict. Baring his fangs, he took a step forward. Already on the verge of falling to the depths below, he stepped forward again.

Subaru: "H-Hey, what are you going to do?"

Reid: "Ya prick, is your yer ability askin' questions? Stop relyin' on me 'n try to pull some darin' moves every once in a while. Talkin' to ya's completely no fun. Ya're not a sexy lady for me to feast my eyes on, nor are ya interestin' to talk to. Ya prick, with what intents're ya tryin' to talk to me?"

Subaru: "————"

Reid: “Lemme ask again, the hell’re ya goin’ to do? One of yer comrades’s just right there, trapped to face a bunch’ve disgustin’ Witchbeasts, ‘n ya’re still just standin’? To say that weak guys ain’t got options’s just a pitiful excuse.”

Just like a carnivore making sport of a herbivore, so did Reid’s philosophy echo the right of the strong.

This philosophy’s incompatibility with Subaru only served to reinforce its veracity; that was the sheer disparity between the strong and the weak.

Reid: “Haaaaah.”

Without neither a word nor glance to Subaru, Reid at last stepped into motion, leaning forward slightly.

There had been no chance to stop him. Like this, Reid fell to the fore, weightless, tracing the path that Subaru had followed to his death.

Straight, straight, straight down Reid fell. Back then, Natsuki Subaru’s consciousness had left him before he had crashed into the ground, and he had not been able to even see the moment which had actually brought upon his demise.

That red-haired swordsman, Reid, dropped down in the same way, falling, falling——

THUMP THUMP

Its back being struck by sandals falling from such great heights, a Centaur’s equine body was crushed. Its limbs, unable to bear that impact, shattered. It was unbelievable how the Witchbeast’s huge body had been smashed, blood the color of black ink spraying out, staining the floor of the Fifth Floor.

Completing this scene was, falling from a height that would have been fatal to Subaru, energetically stomping on the remains of the Witchbeast, the violence of Reid Astrea.

Subaru: “————”

The Witchbeasts, which likely did not possess intelligence judging from their looks, ceased their movements. Noticing the chaotic appearance of this red-haired man, their baby-like wails stopped.

Looking closely revealed that these headless Witchbeasts were using their non-visual senses to gauge their opponent, was what Subaru surmised.

Reid's abnormality was clear to them, using just their organs remaining that were devoid of sight.

That observation was equally apparent to the Knight, with all five senses intact, who had been engaged in a vigorous battle with these creatures.

Julius: "You, why… are you here…"

Reid: "Why, why, why. Is there anythin' else y'all pricks can ask at all? What's the secret to bein' popular with women, what's the best kinda alcohol, how'd'cha get to be so strong, for instance?"

Standing in front of Julius, whose eyes were wide open in sheer shock, Reid brushed away the pieces of meat on the soles of his sandals. He turned his hand to another Centaur standing beside him.

As if it were a joke, in his hand, he held a thin, wooden stick—— he could see that he was holding a chopstick.

Reid: "The secret to bein' popular with women's my face. The best kinda alcohol's Granhiert brandy—— 'N as for how I'm the strongest in the damn world? Simply 'cause I'm me."

Pausing for a moment after he finished speaking, Reid moved the chopsticks at his fingertips ever so lightly.

In the next moment, the frozen Centaur's body exploded in a shower of blood. Slow to detect the collapse of its body, the Witchbeast finally released the cries of its throes of death. Those screams, reminiscent of the cries of a baby, clinging desperately to this world, were indeed the worst in taste.

However, a smile remained firmly on the face of the man who had caused all this. He raised his unbloodied weapons, his chopsticks, once more; this time not towards the Witchbeasts, but Julius.

Then, looking at the yellow irises of the faraway Julius, who seemed to dread those chopsticks far beyond what he appeared to, Reid bared his fangs.

Reid: "Right, let's get the rest of the Examination goin'. Try 'n wrench 'em away before I get bored with this, ya prick."

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Norvak (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 52 – God, Please Forgive Me

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 6 “Re: ZERO -Life Starts in Another World-”, Parts 2-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (DiscountAnon/Nanashi-tan, GracedHarperd, Ice/Ice_Occultism, PaperLightning, Ringo) — Complete

——An unpleasant sword dance began to unfold, with the stage being the atrium of the Fifth Floor.

???: “————”

With his long, red hair flying about, the eyepatch-clad man flawlessly weaved left and right, with absolute control of his burly body, wielding only short, fragile sticks of wood. Unfolding right on the stage was an unbelievable spectacle.

???: “——KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

A Witchbeast in the form of a Centaur rushed towards the redhead, its half-human, half-horse form raising a cry that sounded like something a newborn baby would emit.

The Witchbeast’s upper-half, the human part, had no head. It wielded a sword of flame, carrying it in both hands; were one’s body to come into contact with this immeasurable, scorching heat, even if only merely a graze, certainly it would end up becoming carbonized.

And, yet, how was it that the man was doing this? He had twisted his body into this dance within the searing heat, fending it off as if it was child’s play, using only those plain-as-day wooden sticks that he carried about.

Flames did not alight upon the wooden sticks which had successfully warded the creature off. They did not catch on fire. Why!?

——Perhaps it was just because he was swinging those wooden sticks faster than they could catch on fire and burn.

The reason why his wooden sticks were not seared by the fire was because he was swinging the sticks faster than they could catch aflame.

The reason why he had warded off those slashes of flame was because he would shift his sword flashes, conferring unto them the minimal amount of strength needed with the gale of his blades.

And, it seemed like the reason why that man found this so enjoyable, as the air around him became red-hot with murderous intent, was because he was absolutely insane.

Fully enjoying this crazy situation like it were the prime of this world, Reid in this crazed state resumed the Examination.

Reid: “Look, look, look, look, look, look, look, look! What happened, ya prick?! Are ya playin’, ya prick?! Unlike before, it’s time to get serious, ya prick. Use yer companions ‘round’cha, time to take vengeance on me! C’mon, c’mon, c’mon, c’mon, c’mon, c’mon, c’mon, c’mon!”

While bellowing angrily, with spittle flying from his mouth into the midst of the flames, Reid held a wooden stick in each hand. In a similar manner to how those blue eyes glared at him, Julius was encircled by the flames around him.

As Julius dealt with the Witchbeasts around him with sword in hand, a sudden feeling of tension and bewilderment floated across his face; he wished not to pay any heed to the words of Reid, who, as expected, was treating this as if this were song and dance.

And with that same expression, Julius shouted out.

Julius: “What the heck, what are you thinking!? All these Witchbeasts came from the basement! This is a big deal for the Tower, we should combine our strength!”

Reid: “Wowzers! Bein’ a dude who’s a well-mannered swordster, ya sure are well-mannered in how ya think too, huh. You, like this, can ya even enjoy livin’? From my experience, guys who hold off on doin’ what they wanna do, live much borin’ lives than guys who do what they wanna, understand, ya prick?”

Julius: “What do you…”

Reid: “First of all, what’s the problem with lettin’ those disgustin’ burnin’ horseys run ‘round? They’re only as bothersome as rain to me. ‘Cept rain’s plenty bothersome, ‘cause I’ve got frizzy hair, ya see.”

Julius’s argument had come from a sensible point of view, but Reid laughed at it like it had been madness-spurned nonsense from a madman’s reasoning.

Comparing the flock of clearly murderous Witchbeasts of flame to something on the same level as the rain served as proof that any reasoning within Reid was long dead. There were no chances of there being any proper logic to it, holding no meaning save for filling the minds of those listening with confusion and chaos.

Julius: “——Hk!”

Upon hearing this, Julius was disturbed by a thought he had never even considered, and as a result, a trace of hesitation was born in him as he brandished his sword, and his parry to the Centaur’s attack was belated.

Julius: “Darn——!”

Julius did not meet the arcing, flaming sword with his sword, he instead dodged it with something like a backward somersault. And straight afterwards, another Centaur came to trample his head under its hooves. He avoided it by jumping forwards using his momentum from his landing. He thrusted his sword towards the body of the Witchbeast that had been wielding the flaming sword just before as the Witchbeasts behind them screamed——

Centaur: “——KSEEEEEEEEEEGH!!”

As he went to turn around, a hoof-kick caught Julius’s left shoulder.

There was a muffled sound, and then a look of anguish ran across his handsome features. Even so, he used the momentum of the hoof to turn his body around, and with his Knight’s sword, he cut down the Witchbeast by its legs, and with one mighty sword sweep he ran his sword through its body. Then, he slammed the pommel of his own sword into his bleeding left shoulder.

The sound of raw meat and bone reverberated, and far more drastic than had been the case when Reid had treated Subaru's own shoulder, his bone slotted back into place.

Reid: "Kah! And that's that. Heh, not bad, that expression of yers."

As their giant burning bodies and trampling hooves transformed the Fifth Floor into a burning hellhole, only one person, Julius, had dared to fight against everyone's despair. Reid was pleased by this, with a cruel smile taking form on his face.

The Witchbeasts, unable to reason, would consider Reid and Julius equally harmful opponents. However, their troublesomeness was clearer than flame, for any possessing intelligence.

Stained with blood, lacking his usual elegance, Julius's sword kept the Witchbeasts' attacks at bay and steadily cut them down one-by-one. Meanwhile, Reid did not seem troubled, and with martial arts skills that were about the same, or higher than Julius, he was reaping the lives of the Witchbeasts as if he were a deity of death. And, in the meanwhile——

Julius: "——Guh."

Reid: "But, watch yer step. Well tho', from how I see it, ya gotta watch yer everywhere."

Picking his ear seemingly in boredom, Reid's long leg slammed into Julius's back, which had been turned towards the former. How much power had been in that kick? Having received it, Julius's body was blown away with ease, just like a stone wrapped up in a piece of cloth, and crashed into the Tower's wall.

The impact could be felt reverberating all throughout the Tower, the Witchbeasts let out a shrill cry, welcoming their prey's predicament. The herd of Witchbeasts rushed forward in a mad scramble towards Julius, who was coughing up blood hunched down on the floor.

Julius: "Guh, AHH!"

Julius slid his torso up from the ground, and as he kicked out at one of the hooves with his long legs, he jumped back onto his feet. Using that momentum, Julius clambered up using the shoulders and the torso of one of the Witchbeasts that had rushed forward as a foothold, and tried to break through their encirclement. He pointed his left hand towards a gap left in between the Witchbeasts.

Julius: "————"

Nothing happened. Grasping his protruding left hand, Julius's face showed bitterness. The Witchbeasts had turned around, drawing nearer towards Julius because of that gap——

Reid: "——Even at a time like this, y'ain't gotten serious yet, ya prick."

Julius found himself between the Witchbeasts, while Reid sighed and waved his stick as he cut in.

Holding one each in both hands, a heavy gust of wind was raised as he swung them, lifting around about ten of the Centaurs up into the air. A sensation of being unaware at what had happened arose in the Witchbeasts as they felt their hooves floating in midair.

Reid: "Die, ya useless horses!"

Right there, Reid gently took a step and jumped up, towards the Witchbeasts. One-by-one, he cleaved the torsos in half, pierced their heart, broke their upper body, destroying all of the Witchbeasts, massacring them all, total annihilation in different manners.

From flying in the air, to scattering their corpses on the ground, everything had happened in about two or three seconds.

The Witchbeasts, known for their tremendous lethality, had been killed without anything they could do about it, all destroyed.

Then, the Centaurs which filled the Fifth Floor were swept away, and it felt like there was room for some relief——

Reid: "Jeez, there ain't any end to 'em. One after another, they emerge from their nest."

Reid clicked his tongue, and, as if to confirm what he had said and indicated, from the stairs that led towards the Sixth Floor underneath, the sounds of hooves and the cries of their baby-like voices were once again approaching the Fifth Floor.

If this went on, due to the accumulation of the corpses, it would only be a matter of time before the Witchbeasts would go up. If the sand sea outside was the natural habitat of these Witchbeasts, it was impossible to fathom that they would run out of stock.

Reid seemed to have a similar idea, and he slowly crossed his arms together,

Reid: “It’s a time where man comes down feelin’ like leavin’ ‘n settlin’ a few things on my plate, ‘n they’re just gettin’ in the damn way. They’re fucking annoyin’, mhhhm, oy.”

Julius: “Wait, go out? Things are in this state, and you are still saying you want to go outside the Tower!?”

Reid: “Ya heard me, that’s my conclusion. Like I said. These guys ain’t nothin’ but drops of rain, playin’ with ‘em’s just borin’. They’re really nothin’ special. Only the smokin’ hottie was capable of playin’ with me… The rest of y’all, ya prick, can’t match up to my level at all.”

Julius: “——Kh!”

Clenching his teeth, Julius was highly dissatisfied with Reid’s attitude, but he hesitated to express that.

If he lost his temper here, the discussion with Reid would break down. In this case, the situation would be against both Reid Astrea and the Witchbeasts. Yes, that was what Julius’s rationality had settled on.

Glancing at him, seeing Julius’s hesitation in an instant and the anguish that was clear as day,

Reid: “Nothin’ can be done ‘bout it, it’s their nature.”

Reid was disappointed from the bottom of his heart, and he muttered, which made Julius’s cheeks become stiff.

How much anguish was coursing there? Julius’s, his expression and overly complex emotional vortex, it was like a child heading for the top of the mountain which was covered by clouds.

The pain within his heart was absolutely invisible to everyone other than him.

——However, it was immediately after that, that the hellfire spouting from below rose up, aiming at Julius. All of what was happening below was well visible to the mediocre guy looking down at the battlefield from up high.

Subaru: “——Ahh.”

With everything having reached this point, as Natsuki Subaru overlooked the Fifth Floor fight from above, he realized that he had even forgot to breathe because of the situation downstairs.

Subaru: "————"

Beneath his eyes, the melee between Reid and Julius, with the Witchbeasts added to the equation, was on an absurd dimension, in which Subaru, lump of banality as he was, could not even think of intruding.

Struck with admiration towards Reid, who operated far outside the norm, he could feel nothing but fresh-born awe towards him.

But, for the first time, he witnessed Julius's fight. His swordsmanship and skills, were at a level at which Subaru could not remotely take advantage of him.

If Subaru challenged him, he would definitely have all his limbs lopped off in an instant; it would only be an ugly defeat. To face him without utmost seriousness, with only a wooden practice sword, well, that nonchalant face would never waver. There would only be agonizing, crushing defeat.

Whether it was Emilia, or Julius, or Ram, it was all the same.

Or, say, Beatrice and Echidna as well, not to mention Shaula, and everyone in this Tower. Natsuki Subaru's meager power could not be compared with theirs.

He had taken them, the people of this world, the inhabitants of this fantasy world far too lightly.

Weak and young, Meili was the only one he had killed. Even then, it had been "Natsuki Subaru" who had performed that deed, which meant that Subaru did not participate in that.

He could not kill what he was unable to kill.

Natsuki Subaru realized that he lacked the strength to fulfill the Book of The Dead Plan.

Subaru: "————"

After realizing that, Natsuki Subaru's heart became hesitant.

Amazed while standing, Julius lost his calm, and was slow to notice the Witchbeasts behind him. Reid had indeed noticed them, but showed no signs of warning him.

At this rate, Julius would be immolated to death by the flames of the Witchbeasts, who were approaching him from behind—— The fulfilment of the possibility that had crossed his mind before. That Julius's Book of The Dead would also be added to the Library.

Subaru could not make this situation unfold with his own hands.

It would be a tragedy, by going with the flow of the situation, Subaru would push Julius to his Death——

Subaru: "——BEHIND YOU, JULIUS!!"

Julius: "——Hk!"

Upon hearing that scream, Julius's body reflexively unstiffened. Without hesitation, his slender body flew to the right, over the hellfire that had been set loose from behind him and swept across the floor of the Fifth Floor, incinerating everything in its wake.

Explosive flames which dyed the air crimson; the source of this continuous emission was a Witchbeast an entire size larger than all the previous ones.

A difference in the body size between adults and children, adolescents and adults—— whether or not such distinctions existed amongst Witchbeasts, Subaru felt such a discrepancy in their power levels.

Big Centaur: "————KSEEEEEEEEEEGH!!"

Cloaked by the flames, the big Centaur made a piercing noise, gathering several other smaller Centaurs around him. Once again, the Fifth Floor was swarmed by a herd.

The situation returned once again into a stalemate. Having been caught up in the aftermath of the hellfire, Julius flung off the burning cloak, having had its hem set alight by tongues of fire, without turning back towards the Witchbeasts, with now nimble figure.

His gaze was now turned overhead, towards Subaru, who was feeling desperate and unable to move.

Julius: "————"

Subaru: “Uh…”

That moment, even with the distance between them, Julius’s and Subaru’s gazes crossed with each other’s.

Even though they were clearly quite a distance apart, in positions where they could not even see the other’s face clearly, Subaru felt the complex emotion buried in those yellow eyes, letting out a groan from the depths of his throat.

Doubt, confusion, hesitation, worry, various shades of negative emotions swirled around within the depths of his eyes. They pierced straight into the depths of Natsuki Subaru’s inexpressible guilt, and——

And then, just after, speaking this to Subaru who wanted to do nothing but run away from there, Julius spoke out.

Julius: “——I am leaving Echidna, Anastasia-sama, in your hands!!”

Subaru: “————”

Julius pointed his sword towards Subaru—— no, not at Subaru; behind him, his shot was likely to point up to the Fourth Floor.

With trust that was cracked and full of scars, he had clung onto this supplication.

Or perhaps, as if it had been the right thing to shout right now, even Julius himself could not brush away all his doubts. Those were words he shouted among all this.

Doubtful, confused, hesitant, concerned, he still did not stop, and made a decision.

That was why——

Subaru: “——Kh!”

Like a bullet, Subaru lifted his heavy legs which were attached to the ground, and ran as fast as he could. Scrambling forward, while stumbling, he clumsily ran.

He turned his back to the spiral staircase and started running.

He did not know the destination. Was he escaping, or not escaping? He did not even know that anymore.

He did not understand his feelings, but even so he could not stop running.

Leaving Julius downstairs, in the place where there was a horde of Witchbeasts and Reid, Subaru ran away like a rabbit.

Reid: "——Woah. Truly, truly no helpin' it, that nature."

In the distance, Reid, who was watching the situation from afar, muttered silently.

Mutters which seemed identical to his previous one.

Whether or not a touch of emotion was lodged into them was unclear.

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——Why did he scream? Why couldn't he let him die right there?

Subaru: "Haa, haa…!"

While he sprinted almost running out of breath, Subaru questioned himself over and over again in his head.

Why did he scream? Why couldn't he let him die right there?

Meili: "Letting him die shouldn't feel any different than killing him yourself, right?"

Embracing Subaru's back as he ran, the shade of the girl sentimentally grumbled her complaint.

The shade had not come out even once after Reid's appearance. Her voice, although, cursed him with "Even though my neck was strangled", entirely torturing Subaru.

In actual fact, it was like that.

Subaru's actions were contradictory. His thoughts, his actions, his desires and his goals, none of them aligned.

The Book of The Dead Plan was constantly in a corner of his head, that craving awaited eagerly for an opportunity.

The shade of the deceased girl could see through Subaru's conflicts, so why did he, even when she had given him a push in the back by calling out to him in his time of doubt, waste his chance?

Subaru: "————"

He had given Julius a chance to escape the line of fire.

However, in the end he had remained downstairs, where the danger of Reid and the Witchbeasts was very much still present. It was a half-hearted way of leaving someone to die. Was it that he just did not wish to be involved in the actual scene?

Having strangled Meili with his own hands, the depths of his heart had that impulsive horror engraved upon it. Could he say that it was such that he wished not to see someone else die in front of him?

Was that why he ran away so desperately?

Regardless of the words, and everything, which had been left to him by Julius, entrusted by Julius——

???: "——Subaru!"

While he was absorbed in his thoughts, Subaru's feet were abruptly stopped by an overbearing call. When he stopped in his tracks, lurching forward, the voice he heard came from a side-passage that he had gone past without noticing.

Coming from the other side of the corner, a shadow rushed over to Subaru. It was——

???: "I was looking for you, in fact! Right now going there is too dangerous, I suppose!"

Subaru: "B-Beatrice…!? And…"

Holding up the hem of her dress, Beatrice came running up to him with an earnest expression. After Julius, Subaru felt both relief and surprise at the same time at having confirmed her safety as well.

However, the surprises did not cease there. Someone else was accompanying her from behind,

Subaru: “Echidna!? Why are you two together…”

“Anastasia”: “…It had to be here that I met you, Natsuki-kun.”

With a slightly disturbed breath, the girl following behind Beatrice—— Echidna, grumbled so.

Aside from the surprise of the unexpected meeting, what had taken a strict hold of Subaru’s heart even more was the emotion in Echidna’s pale green eyes, which were being cast his way.

Subaru: “——Hk.”

That clear as day suspicion would be made aware to someone in Subaru’s position whether they wanted or not.

Reid, of course, knew nothing. Julius and Beatrice’s demeanors clearly indicated that they also did not know anything at all. However, Echidna’s demeanor told a different story.

——Echidna knew.

About the exchange that Subaru, Emilia, and Ram had had in the room where he hid Meili’s corpse, during which he was locked up in a prison of ice.

And, possibly, that might not be limited to only her.

He remembered how Julius had looked at him with a complex emotion at the end.

All of them had supposedly shared what had happened to Subaru when he woke up. So, it was only natural for Echidna to react this way, rather——

Subaru: “Beatrice, you’re…”

Beatrice: “——hk! Right now’s not the time to talk about that, in fact! Come over here, I suppose!”

However, in contrast to Subaru who was remembering his hesitation, Beatrice one-sidedly took his hand. Subaru's quivering voice was blotted out, caught off guard by her action, having been grabbed by her tiny hand.

As a matter of fact, if they had been informed by Ram and the others of his circumstances, it was immeasurable how much determination would be required to go ahead with this action. It was such a careless move that it made Subaru want to question their sanity.

"Anastasia": "Beatrice, are you serious? He escaped the cage! In a situation like this!"

However, Beatrice taking Subaru's hand made Echidna's face go pale and scream at them. She was questioning the pros and cons of Beatrice's actions. She raised her own hand above and pointed one of her fingers towards Subaru. The look of that gesture held more pressure.

That seemingly restrained attitude did not seem like a bluff to Subaru. To him the situation very much akin to being held at gunpoint.

However, the threat to his life, Subaru took it as a matter of course.

From Echidna's point of view, being wary of Subaru was obvious. Beatrice was, for some reason—— even now, standing in front of Subaru and standing off even against Echidna.

"Anastasia": "Hold it, Beatrice! With such odd behavior, siding with him is a dangerous choice, so I cannot allow it! Just as Ram warned, he is not Natsuki Subaru!"

Beatrice: "That's not true, in fact! Holding his hand like this… Betty, who has been in contact with him like this, knows, I suppose! Subaru and Betty are still bound by our Contract, in fact. You would understand this if you're in the same position as Betty, I suppose!"

"Anastasia": "…Even if that is the case, he is still untrustworthy! Escaping his cage in circumstances like this! How can I trust him at all? There is no possible explanation for this!"

As Echidna screamed so, her expression held the strongest emotion he had ever seen of her. To date, she had always stifled her feelings skillfully—— that she had always given off that air now seemed painfully anxious.

Continuously forceful, she desperately tried to eliminate the threat before her. Desperately, doing so.

Subaru: "————"

An overwhelming number of Witchbeasts were overflowing downstairs, every single thing happening in this Tower was to be feared.

It was natural she would have an outburst when thrown into that impossible situation, he thought while looking at that.

Subaru: "Just, whatever."

Beatrice: "Subaru?"

The eyes of Beatrice, who was holding his hand, widened in shock upon hearing Subaru's whisper. That Beatrice's small soft hand was then released.

With a sudden sound, something that had until now been pulled taught, snapped. Snapped, like so.

"Anastasia": "…What are you trying to do?"

With Subaru having pushed away Beatrice's shoulders, Echidna furrowed her brow at him as he stepped forward. Bewildered, her caution was more than that. Even then, Subaru's heart did not falter.

Subaru: "Just as you see, I'm giving up… Just, do whatever you want with me."

He felt like his emotions could not stir into anything else now, other than having whatever happens happen.

He had committed a crime he did not remember, he desperately wanted to conceal all of it, causing those around him to be suspicious, and if he just tried to stay in peace, his life would be targeted. All while being continuously frightened by the shadow of "Natsuki Subaru".

"Anastasia": "With that admirable attitude, do you think we will lower our guard? If so, you are making a big mistake. From the bottom of my heart, I cannot trust you."

Subaru: "Fine, whatever. You're free to add that in too—— This Tower, is finished…"

Subaru could not handle it.

He had gone over his mental capacity, having gone through one too many impossible situations. This was, just him wanting to grumble at his blockade.

However, it seemed that Echidna thought differently.

“Anastasia”: “This Tower is…? In other words, you have already achieved your goal?”

Subaru: “…My goal?”

“Anastasia”: “Do not feign ignorance! Your goal, it is the Witch’s Shrine, is it not!? Because your goal is fulfilled, everything reveals its true nature… I should have followed Ana’s intuition. I should not have brought anyone else here.”

Echidna’s voice, speaking with anguish, was filled with contrition and remorse. It was like Subaru was unknowing of its origins.

Just now, she was seeing something Subaru could not. Moreover, she suspects that Subaru was related to that—— But did it even matter? The end of the world was approaching.

Beatrice: “Subaru, Subaru! What’s wrong with you, in fact!? The way you’re talking, it’s nothing like Subaru, I suppose! You can’t stop in such a place like this, in fact!”

Subaru: “Like, me?”

Beatrice appealed and pulled Subaru’s sleeve, whose expression had completely disappeared.

The trembling voice shook his ears, and Subaru stared at Beatrice.

Subaru: “What is, being like me. Just where is that being like me, which you guys are seeing.”

“Anastasia”: “…Amnesia. Do you intend to continue your disgusting farce? You know that Ram has lost memories of her little sister, or Julius who has had himself forgotten, and the fact many have had the memories of their precious ones erased, and yet you maintain your cruel act!”

Subaru: “Act!? Act you say!? Give me a break! If it’s acting, then isn’t it obvious I’d act with much more determination!? Who would… who would like to become «Natsuki Subaru», by their choice! Who would become that disgusting guy!!”

With his brain a total mess, Subaru burst out with anger at Echidna, surpassing her own.

Had they the freedom of choice, had they the luxury of being picky, who would like to become “Natsuki Subaru”? Twisted, unbearable, that was the kind of existence he was. Just who would want that.

——Just who, would wish to become “Natsuki Subaru”?

Subaru: “You’re all just ganging up on me! Who do you think you are! I lost everything! I was just coming back from the convenience store! All I remember is that there was just the store clerk with me! From that, suddenly a different world? A Tower of sand? A dead body! Examinations! Fakeness! “Natsuki Subaru”! Don’t mess with me! Don’t mess with, me!”

“Anastasia”: “————”

Subaru: “That’s right! It must be my fault! I came here when I shouldn’t have had! I didn’t want to go back home! I was too scared to bother Dad and Mom by putting on a fake look on my face! So, I was all excited in the beginning, but only in the beginning!”

Beatrice and Echidna were staring open-eyed at the emotions of the exploding Subaru.

They surely would not know their meaning. To them, Subaru’s anguish was simply meaningless.

He had also confessed of this being a different world for him.

However, they did not understand the meaning of “different world” in its truest sense—— There was an unquestionable gap between their understanding.

Subaru was not the “Natsuki Subaru” they were seeking.

Likewise, they too, would never become the salvation Subaru was seeking.

Subaru: “You must all be thinking why I’m blowing my temper right now all of a sudden, right? I don’t know either! But, I have just, suddenly reached my limit! Because I’m like this, something that was perfectly fine snapped! Even if I was implored, I can’t do anything! Not a single thing! So!”

“Anastasia” & Beatrice: “————”

Subaru: “So… just forgive me now. Please forgive me. Please, send me back home… If God, wanted to, punish me then, I understand… It was my fault.”

Subaru said, overwhelmed, with his voice gradually growing hoarse, and holding back all his bitterness.

He asked for forgiveness, as he rubbed his forehead on the ground of the corridor. He did not know who he should ask this of, so he prayed to God. Taking the name of all the Gods that were to his knowledge, he prayed.

He wished forgiveness for the punishment given to him, to his slothful self.

Reflection and regrets, he had surely done both enough to change his life.

So, please forgive me.

He no longer wished to have anyone else involved in the punishment resulting from Natsuki Subaru’s foolishness.

He did not want to be hurt himself, he did not want to hurt anyone else.

Subaru: “————”

Cowering, Subaru desperately and tearfully appealed to the silent Echidna and Beatrice.

Beatrice’s palm gently stroked Subaru’s back, who was squatted down next to the two of them.

That feeling of the palm of someone not of the same incorrigibleness as him, why did it still persist with him?

Hearing the answer of that question was too hurtful for Subaru.

“Anastasia”: “…I do not believe you.”

Beatrice: “Echidna…”

Beatrice called out to Echidna, who had sighed out her conclusion.

At her voice, Echidna loosely shook her head.

“Anastasia”: “Even if you cradle your head and sob, none of my doubt will be erased. My answer shall remain the same. I am… I have the responsibility of borrowing Ana’s body. For her safe return, no matter who curses me, who hates me, I will bear it.”

Beatrice: “————”

“Anastasia”: “…However, I do not want to do anything that leaves me incapable of facing Ana upon her return.”

Saying that, Echidna gradually lowered her fingers towards Subaru’s forehead.

Seeing the fingers lose the pressure they had ever since coming to this aisle, it became obvious that the issue of those fingers holding Subaru’s life had been solved.

But, that had nothing to do with the salvation Subaru wished for.

“Anastasia”: “Beatrice, you are free to go with him. I plan to go to where Julius is. After reuniting with him, if no surprises arise, we will meet again above.”

Beatrice: “…Understood, I suppose. Hey, Subaru, stand now, in fact. If you can’t stand, then Betty’s ready to even carry you, I suppose.”

Echidna turned her back and recognized that Beatrice respected her beliefs. At that time, as Beatrice tried to lend her small shoulder to him, Subaru stared at Echidna’s back, who was trying to keep distance from his affairs.

——I am leaving Echidna, Anastasia-sama, in your hands!!

“Anastasia”: “——By this, what do you think you are doing?”

Echidna turned her head around and glared intensely—— at the hand which grabbed the sleeve of her left hand.

Echidna had directed her question to Subaru, whose face was all messy with tears and a runny nose, his cheeks stiffening at her enquiry.

He was unable to answer what he was doing right away.

Subaru could not stand the look in Echidna's accusations. Even so, having heard Subaru's unsightly plea, it had been Echidna's judgement to not lay her hands on him.

As she realized that, Subaru's fingers continued to damage her judgement.

"Anastasia": "I thought I was handing you over. Even so, how come has it come down to this?"

Subaru: "…Julius, asked me to."

"Anastasia": "He did? Do not jest. He could, make this decision, but…"

At that moment, Echidna, who was the reason behind Subaru's tears, reconsidered what she was going to say, letting out a "Before that",

"Anastasia": "Did you meet him before coming here? He should have headed over to take a look at the situation on the Fifth Floor. And if he met with you… No, rather than that, what did he ask you for? Right now, he is…"

Subaru experienced an overwhelming pressure due to her threatening attitude, hearing those rapid-fire questions.

The cracks in his heart had yet to heal, in the first place. Just why, did his body act, for a world out of his control, where he could not do anything.

Why, until recalling Julius's scream, which could hardly be called a promise——

"Anastasia": "Yeah, we are making no progress. Anyway, where did you last meet Julius, tell…"

Subaru: "——Ah."

Echidna, driven with impatience, picked words to continue the conversation.

Looking at her efforts, Subaru gulped.

It was not because he was hesitating to tell her.

A situation even more urgent, than this unavoidable one with Echidna, had come up.

Subaru: "————"

Behind Echidna, who was staring at Subaru—— a dot of red light floated across the aisle.

Subaru was distracted by it, wondering what it was.

The dot of red light, floating in the dark and moving slowly, directly faced Subaru's black eyes.

Subaru understood that this was a situation of being "eye-to-eye" with someone or something, thanks to his mere intuition.

At the same time, the eyes of the one who had locked with his own, its figure was faintly visible through the dark.

A black body that blended in the dark, with a glowing dot of light, and a pair of strangely developed sharp pincers, and above all, a trembling sharp tail stinger——

Subaru: "Huh?"

——An unbelievably huge scorpion, with its tailpiece pointing towards them.

Beatrice: "Subaru!!"

At the moment it swung its tail, Beatrice, who was standing next to him, called out.

——Light swept through the aisle, the shock waves emitted violently shattering the stones which composed the Fourth Floor.

「……ユリウスに、頼まれて」
「彼は五層の様子を見にいったはずだ。……いや、それより頼まれたとは？　彼は今は……」
「――あ」
少女から目を逸らし、言葉に詰まるスバルは苛立つエキドナの向こうを見る。
その現実逃避の視線が、それを捉えた。
――通路の先に浮かぶ、赤い光点だ。
「は」
――刹那、想像を絶するほど巨大なサソリの尾針が、光となって通路を蹂躙した。

Arc 6 Chapter 53 - ——A Voice, Chimed

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 6 “Re: ZERO -Life Starts in Another World-”, Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

The volitant tail stinger which came flying towards them shattered the stone aisle, causing an eruption of smoke as the destruction spread rampantly.

Feeling the spectacle seemingly in slow motion, Subaru witnessed a petite young girl in a dress jump into the core of the vortex of the terrible destruction unfolding before his eyes.

With her vertically rolled hair fluttering, jumping into the destruction head-on, had been Beatrice.

Courage—— no, foolhardiness. Though a matter of course, the petite young girl’s build was fragile, it had much less capacity to withstand the tail stinger’s blow than the stone monument. Should she even try to act as a shield, the young girl, with her stature, would not be able to obstruct any strike above Subaru’s chest.

In other words, it was naught but an impulsive action, naught but a death futile.

Just as how the sobbing Subaru, with his face stained with nasal mucus, had grasped Echidna’s sleeve.

Just as how he had ultimately called out Julius’s name, who had been scorched in the flames of deeds.

Just as how he had tried to slam Ram’s head into the wall, and had not abided by the illusionary young girl’s advice.

Beatrice too, had overlooked the impossible, and tried to receive and halt the tail stinger——

Subaru: “Woah!?”

Beatrice: “——Incomplete EMT, in fact!”

At that instant, Beatrice, who had appeared forth, grasped Subaru’s hand and held her empty hand aloft ahead.

At the same pace with the young girl’s shout, something invisible to the eyes similar to energy flowed out of Subaru’s body. Before Subaru, whose head was tottering, the tail stinger’s blow was blocked by what appeared to be a light screen, which had been activated in front of Beatrice’s pointing palm.

Subaru: “————”

The shockwave, which gave one the impression of this being the last thing one would get to see, was blocked by the defensive wall with Beatrice’s palm as its center and it unrolled the damage onto the environs, seemingly avoiding Subaru and the others.

The launched tail stinger did not end with a single blow, and rained upon them continuously. However, all of those were blocked by the shield which had taken the form of the young girl named Beatrice, and led the damage onto their rear.

The terrible shock wave blew violently, one of the scattered fragments of the aisle grazed Subaru’s cheek.

The noise became further distant, in a situation where his field of vision became white and as he squinted his eyes due to the pain of his cheek, Subaru had his glance robbed by Beatrice’s back.

There was titanic scorpion which had been visible for a single instant; if that which had had rained incessantly upon them was indeed that scorpion’s tail stinger, then it was a matter of course that it was a mortar which could effortlessly turn a human body to dust.

Having that be shielded by a young girl with such a small build, gave Subaru the chance to pick up his life.

An instant before, he had been thinking of what unimaginable hell must he endure, having continued to wish for salvation from God.

Subaru had no room to be cursing his own misfortune, and close to his awareness, an existence separate from Beatrice or the scorpion had been present in the corner of his field of vision.

That was Echidna, who had been dragged into this attack and exposed to the same damage.

She had once declared acting separately and tried to part ways with Subaru and Beatrice, but immediately preceding the commencement of the attack she had been restrained by Subaru, and thus dragged into this situation.

Fortunately, she had also been in the location Beatrice was protecting, so the tail stinger's damage had been obstructed by the light screen and did not reach through. However, that was all.

What Beatrice had blocked was merely the direct damage that had been rained upon them by the tail stinger.

She had not been able to defend against the secondary damage the tail stinger brought with itself. In other words——

"Anastasia": "——Wo, ah!"

Raising her voice faintly, Echidna lost her balance and collapsed backwards. Though she stepped back in order to support her body, there was no floor to support her legs.

Shattered by the tail stinger's attack, the aisle had crumbled halfway. As a result, the structure of the Tower's aisle was damaged and due to the collapse of the floor, ceiling and walls, Echidna lost space to step on. Upon being abandoned into an unknown space, death due to falling would be inescapable.

Instinctively comprehending that fear, a sense of impending crisis levitated in Echidna's eyes.

Subaru: "——Hk!"

Subaru instantaneously stepped ahead and grasped Echidna's hand, preventing her from falling to her demise.

"Anastasia": "Natsuki-kun…!?"

Beatrice had grasped his right hand, while he grasped Echidna's with his left hand.

Thanks to Reid's coercive surgery his shoulder was still in, yet the pain was deep-rooted, so his shoulder may get dislocated if overused. Without handing the responsibility over to Beatrice, who was busy desperately catching the tail stinger, Subaru braced his legs as he gnashed his molars and had no choice but to muster the entirety of his strength in order to restrain Echidna's body weight.

Subaru: "Guh, ahhhh…!"

Regardless of her small stature, Echidna possessed the weight of a human. Lifting a human was not an easy task to begin with. Much less with a single hand, much less by a wounded person, much less with the other person being uncooperative due to this crisis—— even upon being pulled, the danger of falling had not been reduced.

Though that was something which was well understood, even if not given any thought. Why, he had braved this risk.

"Anastasia": "…Do not do something which will make me surmise something about you."

Subaru: "Like, I care…! It was just instantaneous…!"

"Anastasia": "That response… does seem fitting of Natsuki-kun, as well!"

Overlapping the exhausted soliloquy, he refuted Echidna's remarks, whom he had saved reflexively. Though unshapely, she turned her body around and, with the support of Subaru's arm, somehow laid foot upon the crumbled floor.

Somehow supporting her actions until the very end, Subaru looked down onto his arm.

——Letters engraved as wounds, patterns of black speckles covering it which he did know happened when, painful and fierce white scars all over his body remained which had been carved by his own volition.

Subaru: "It moves better than, what's in the limits… of my memories?"

His arm's functioning being better than what he remembered, or the countless scratches on them. His physique, which had become slightly stronger, had narrowly managed to save Echidna from falling to death.

Though his body was too defective and limited for the execution of the Book of the Dead Plan.

“Anastasia”: “Somehow I managed, to get back up…! Beatrice! How are things on your end!?”

Beatrice: “About to, hit the limit, I suppose! About time…”

Putting her unfitting emotions somewhere else, Echidna, having climbed up, called out to Beatrice with a grim expression. At her call, Beatrice stiffened her lovely cheeks and responded and at the very next instant——

Scorpion: “——Bishaaan!!”

The scorpion, which must have unleashed a rapid-fire of the tail stinger, clung to the ceiling and pointed its enormous pincers towards them while letting out a cry.

Subaru: “——Hk.”

With the seemingly scything down pincers closing in, Subaru had his thoughts slowly washed away.

According to his ordinary knowledge, speaking of a scorpion gave rise to a strong image of a venomous stinger the truth was, over the thousands of species of scorpions, those venomous were only a few dozen in number. In that case, what would be the weapon of a scorpion which hunts without venom—— of course, those pincers would be its weapon.

Sharpness, or perhaps it should be called cutting strength instead. It may seem less hazardous when compared to a venomous stinger, but should the scorpion be this large, its killing ability anyhow cannot be made light of.

That was also made clear through the spectacle of the walls or floor of the Tower, which had managed to barely hold their structure, having been minced like tofu being cut with a knife.

Beatrice: “——Murak.”

Beatrice evaded the spectacle, seemingly a symbol of destruction and massacre, by jumping and rebounding with an unbelievable leap—— no, by flying unnaturally, as if abusing the laws of inertia.

It was a queer sensation, that of having seemingly escaping the effect of gravity with Beatrice at the center. Beatrice grabbed the lower back of Subaru and Echidna’s clothes, taking a large distance away from the scorpion’s attack.

And with the new distance in between, Echidna prepared the fingers of her right hand in the direction of the scorpion's face.

"Anastasia": "El Jiwald——!"

White lines of heat were fired from each of her five fingers respectively, the five beams mowed down the aisle like the claws of a giant and scorched the face, right pincer and shell of the scorpion clinging onto the ceiling.

Perhaps due to being unable to endure that strength and damage, the scorpion vehemently waved about its tail stinger and right pincer, and whilst slipping into the dust which erupted due to the aisle's destruction, retreated to the rear.

"Anastasia": "Jiwald! Jiwald! Jiwaaald~!"

Subaru: "Wait! Calm down, Echidna! It ran away! That thing ran away! It ran away!"

While the scorpion drew back into the plume of smoke, Subaru bound Echidna's arms back, who all the more refused to halt her attack. Even after that, Echidna continued struggling for some time, desperately glaring towards the other side of the plume of smoke, finally relaxing her body and entrusting her body weight onto Subaru.

"Anastasia": "Hah, hah, hah… d-did it, do it?"

Subaru: "…Not, totally. It probably ran away."

Subaru shook his head horizontally before Echidna, who was short of breath and in an unbelievable condition. The cloud of smoke was yet to clear away, but it gave the impression that the scorpion's corpse was not present there.

In fact, even right now he was trembling with the fear of the tail stinger's counterattack from the other side of the plume.

Subaru: "But, isn't that… Eh? That one just now was…"

Beatrice: “A Witchbeast, in fact. A boorish fellow, which suddenly appeared onto this Fourth Floor, I suppose. The tremors in the lower floors, and the Witchbeasts in the Fourth Floor. On top of that, the abnormalities in the upper floors.”

Subaru: “Up, down, inside… are there problems happening everywhere?”

Subaru changed his expression and turned around upon Beatrice’s report, as she made a serious face.

Certainly, Julius was continuing the battle in the lower floors, and the existence of that scorpion—— that Witchbeast had become clear. It was also convincing to believe that the abnormalities in the upper floors were happening due to Reid’s descent.

“Anastasia”: “…Though it seems you do not realize, that one of those problems is you.”

Subaru: “————”

As if trying the very basis of Subaru’s thoughts, Echidna stood alone, having distanced herself from Subaru’s chest. She wiped the sweat off her forehead, gazing at Subaru with vigilance she found impossible to eliminate.

In her pale cerulean eyes was vigilance, suspicion, along with anxiety, perplexity.

“Anastasia”: “Just what… what, are you? Where do you stand, what do you want?”

Subaru: “I, don’t know the details. I said, didn’t I. I don’t know what occurred, and what’s happening either, the same as you. After all, I…”

Beatrice: “——Amnesia.”

Subaru muttered weakly in response to Echidna’s question, unable to respond with nothing but the same former perplexity. The one to claim the last one was Beatrice, who had been lost in thoughts with a serious expression.

Amnesia—— Subaru had opened his heart to subjects regarding that before the two of Emilia and Ram, and none more. In other words, Beatrice and the others were aware of the cage, as well as Subaru’s excuses.

And despite knowing, this was the attitude Beatrice possessed.

Echidna too, thought, as she nearly ran out of words.

“Anastasia”: “How did you, escape from the cage?”

Subaru: “…When I took notice, I was lying outside with a broken shoulder.”

Though he answered straightforwardly and honestly, he did not expect to be believed. However, overlapping lies with lies leading to gradual deterioration was what the current situation was.

Though his self had even prayed to God with a dripping nose to award him with punishment, but there was no longer any point in keeping up appearances and pretenses.

In that mental state Subaru responded to Echidna without any falsehood, making her hesitate to say something for a brief period. But, after that she immediately closed her eyes, and resumed without looking at Subaru.

“Anastasia”: “…Why, did you save me, just now?”

Subaru: “————”

“Anastasia”: “Had you not offered your hand, I would have unmistakably died. Taking Ana’s body with me, it surely would have been a death terribly filled with regrets.”

As if another human’s affairs, the question distanced him away by a single step.

However, the reason she dared to do that was the same as the reason why she abstained from looking at Subaru’s face, eyes. Namely, a last resort to ensure she did not err her judgement due to her emotions.

With Echidna’s such judgement before him, Subaru pondered. Why had his self, offered his hand to Echidna—— was it because Julius had entrusted him in the end?

Did those words, make Subaru offer his hand?

Subaru: “…It was instantaneous, I don’t know.”

However, shaking his head left and right, Subaru denied that notion.

Certainly, Subaru had thought back to Julius's words and moved in order to prevent Echidna from acting separately once. But when her life was actually in danger, the reason why his body had moved had not been due to such deliberate thinking.

He did not know, as to why had his self made such a move.

Subaru: "It's not like everything needs a reason, you know? It was sudden. Everything was sudden. That's why, I…"

Prepared to despair, Subaru expressed the emotions within him whilst faltering. He thought that he would undoubtedly receive a cold response by Echidna, having made her hear this——

"Anastasia": "——That might be, the true nature of the human known as yourself."

Subaru: "Eh…?"

So spilled out Echidna, relaxing her shoulders, having stiffened herself up before his eyes. Upon hearing that Subaru stared in amazement, eaten by the dumbfoundment.

Subaru stood in mute amazement, as Echidna shrugged her shoulders upon his gaze,

"Anastasia": "It is inevitable that we would want to quarrel here. It would also be foolish to remain here for long, and accept the Witchbeast's second attack. Let's move. I want to unite with Julius."

Subaru: "Ah, eh…"

Beatrice: "Agreed, in fact. For now, let's get away from this place, I suppose."

Echidna and Beatrice indifferently determined their plan, leaving out Subaru, who was at sea. Echidna ascertained the area behind Subaru and Beatrice, and Beatrice tightly grabbed Subaru's hand.

Upon that tiny sensation he looked towards the young girl, as Beatrice, with a deep nod,

Beatrice: "Do you not remember, taking Betty outside as well, I suppose."

Subaru: "…I'm sorry. I don't know what you're talking about."

Beatrice: "——It's fine, in fact."

Hearing the terribly transient emotions of loneliness mixed in Beatrice's voice, Subaru felt as if he had committed the most dreadful crime in this world.

But, Beatrice shook her head left and right before Subaru, who was bleached with a fear of unknown nature. And concealing her self's lonesome feelings, carved a daring smile upon her lips.

Beatrice: "Even if Subaru has forgotten, it is still present within Betty's heart, in fact. It is impossible for what Subaru engraved into Betty's heart to fade away at all, I suppose. That's why, it's fine for now, in fact."

Subaru: "Beatrice…"

Beatrice: "Even if Subaru forgets, Betty will never forget. Betty will always remember. And, Betty will also make Subaru remember, I suppose. For that, Betty will do whatever she can, in fact."

Subaru: "————"

That had been a response far too dazzling for Natsuki Subaru, who was standing here all alone.

Just how many predicaments had she overcome, how many times had she tempered her heart into steel, to make a girl this young wield such will.

Subaru: "——Ah."

He could be saved, and upon that sensation Subaru held his breath. Spontaneously, a sensation welling up deep within his eyes tried to kill Subaru, as he braved letting that warmth overflow.

Beatrice supported that strenuous effort of Subaru's, by gripping to his hand without saying a thing.

By merely gripping his hand, it proved to be his support.

"Anastasia": "It does not seem to be possible to tread the path Natsuki-kun came from due the Witchbeast's attack just now. Though undeniably dangerous, it seems there is no choice but to utilize the side of the aisle which remains alright, where the Witchbeast retracted to, and move."

Beatrice: "Echidna, you too…"

“Anastasia”: “Talking about forgiving, not forgiving, doubting, not doubting is unsuitable for this place. Regardless, the suspicions I have cannot be cleared. However, the situation does not allow for that. Creating an order of priorities is an indispensable ability in business. I witnessed that, right by Ana’s side.”

That is why, no more arguments are to be had in this place.

That must be Echidna’s conclusion. Subaru also avoided objecting to Echidna’s judgement, who had made compromises and possessed feelings of rejection, and decided to abide by the judgement of the two.

There was no change in his feeling of wanting to run away even now. However, he wanted to believe that if he crouched down and put his hands on his head, a scene further befitting of pleading for would await him rather than simply offering his prayers to God.

Subaru: “————”

Behind him, the aisle Subaru came running from was in a terrible state. Receiving the attack by the scorpion’s tail stinger as if a catastrophe, most of it had been converted into piles of debris and wreckage and did not seem like it could be used, just as what Echidna had stated.

What Beatrice’s magical safeguard had protected was only her own and the other two’s lives. Even if they tried to move towards Emilia and the others, who were moving separately, or towards Julius, who was fighting on the Fifth Floor, they had no choice but to advance upon that side of the aisle which the scorpion had retreated towards.

Subaru: “Uh…”

Ahead of jumping over the hole due to which Echidna had nearly fallen to her death, after clearing up the smoke in the part of the aisle her white lines of heat had grilled, a reason for Subaru to spontaneously groan fell over there.

——It was that Witchbeast’s tail, which had perhaps fallen off from its roots.

“Anastasia”: “I see, it means there was no counterattack. Its means of attacking splintered off, which is a bit of good news, I guess.”

Beatrice: “That’s what it seems, I suppose… Don’t fall off the floor, in fact. It’s time to jump over, I suppose.”

Beatrice and Echidna nodded to each other as they looked at the fallen tail, which even had the stinger attached. By appearance it was overwhelmingly grotesque, but the Witchbeast had certainly lost its means of long ranged attacks with this.

Of course, the circumstance in the lower floors was that countless Centaurs clad in flames were surging forth. It could not possibly be said that the hazards present within the entire Tower had reduced just because the danger of that one Witchbeast posed had diminished.

Subaru: “——Here.”

Subaru lightly jumped over the hole while continuing to hold Beatrice. Beatrice’s body was light, far too light for any comparison. The fruits of a year’s worth of labor felt by Subaru in his own body which were nowhere to be found in his memories—— her lightness was seemingly irrespective of that.

Subaru: “————”

Keeping that in the back of his mind, Subaru turned his eyes once again towards the fallen tail which lied ahead of the hole on the aisle.

The tail had launched a rapid fire of the stinger as if a catastrophe, but its structure was completely different from the biological features of a scorpion Subaru was aware of, to an extent that it could be called a separate article entirely. Though a matter of course, the venom stinger of a scorpion which Subaru knew could not be used for things like shooting, and probably could not be regenerated either.

Above all, evident from the aisle’s destroyed condition, it had not been firing the tail stinger as an object—— it had been firing power which resembled a stinger in form.

Basically, it could alternatively be said that just like Beatrice’s light screen and Echidna’s white lines of heat from earlier, what the scorpion had fired was something akin to magical stingers.

Naturally, since it had been utilized as a stinger it would no longer be able to invoke it after having lost its tail, that is what he wanted to believe——

Subaru: "——?"

Thinking that far, Subaru embraced unease.

He had noticed it after observing the fallen tail. That fallen tail had been cut off nearly from what was its root, but the wound's mouth appeared as something unusual.

Had it been burned off by Echidna's lines of heat, regardless of cutting strength, there should have been scorch marks remaining on the wound. As a matter of fact, the surrounding part of the aisle which had been struck as well also had such burn marks.

However, there were no traces of that on the scorpion's fallen tail, which instead had an awfully clean cross-section——

Subaru: "——Bea,"

Subaru noticed something was strange. Far too late.

The tail fallen on the floor, which he had kept at the edge of his field of vision, quaked with a start.

——An instant later, a light burst open.

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——There exists a mechanism, named autotomy.

A phenomenon primarily witnessed among arthropods and lizards, it is often called things like "lizard's tail" and refers to the action of cutting off a part of one's own body for escaping from foreign enemies.

This action is also seen among pincers of crabs, and in other words, the Witchbeast shaped as a scorpion had perhaps done something similar.

In the case of a lizard practicing autotomy upon its own tail, the detached portion of the tail moves around for a while and serves the purpose of distracting the enemy while the real deal escapes.

Of course, the tail possesses no such consciousness and only acts reflexively but it is an example of a species which practices autotomy being capable of such reflex action.

Then, would this not be possible as well.

——Once the prey gets close to the detached tail, it would explode and spread damage, a duty like that of a landmine, and also granting the ability to do so to the amputated part.

Subaru: “Uhh, guh, uhh…”

He wailed. Whilst spilling out a wail from his throat, slowly and steadily, Subaru dragged his feet.

As for why he was dragging them, it was not because of fatigue. The problem was physical. With a large and deep tear in the flesh of his left leg, and in a situation where he continuously bled from that wound, he had no choice but to move that way.

And, what Subaru was dragging, was not his body alone.

???: “…Enough, now. Leave me, and go.”

So pronounced Echidna, having lost all her strength, as she was dragged along by Subaru who was dragging his feet.

Subaru had taken both of her armpits in his arms, pulling her from behind and anyhow leaving the scene. Unless they left the scene of the explosion, that Witchbeast would return.

——The scorpion Witchbeast had left the explosion as a parting gift, responsible for ripping Subaru and the others to shreds.

Subaru: “——Shit, shit, shit, shit!”

He had been negligent. He had let his guard down. His mind, had been completely submerged in lukewarm water.

Just an instant before, there had been words which Beatrice had spoken to him, there had been somewhat of a softening in Echidna’s attitude, resulting in a gap within his heart, and that was thoroughly why they were the way they were now.

He was so pathetic, so pathetic, so pathetic from the bottom of his heart, that he teared up.

Why, despite being made to stand before such crises, yet his self displayed no growth. Displayed no change. Troubles, trials, hardships, were they not chances to grow provided by God?

However, if hardships could consist of only being beaten up, bleeding out and having bones broken, having the soul shattered and the life robbed, then just what did humans suffer for.

“Anastasia”: “Natsuki, -kun… This, is, enough…”

Subaru: “It’s not enough! Not a single thing, is enough!”

“Anastasia”: “… Beatrice, rather than, me, right?”

Closing her eyes, Echidna whispered with difficulty. Responding to her words with a yell, Subaru halted his breath upon the words she followed up with.

Echidna’s words, though sad, were sound. Should Subaru be asked who was more valuable to him between Beatrice and Echidna, though sad, Subaru would choose Beatrice.

The worth of lives might be equal, but the worth of humans was not equal. There existed a sequential order when it came to relationships. In a scene of choosing, that order would probably be followed.

——However, Beatrice was not here. She was not there. She was no longer anywhere.

The moment the tail left by the scorpion Witchbeast exploded, Subaru had pulled Beatrice towards himself in fear. How fortunate would it have been, had he been able to protect her body and everything just like that.

However, Subaru’s actions had been tragically slow, and his wish could not be fulfilled.

The tail of the Witchbeast, from which the light exploded and countless stingers were scattered throughout its environs. Though Subaru had not been exposed to that explosion from close proximity either, the reason why he had survived despite being seriously injured was to Beatrice’s credit entirely.

The moment Subaru hugged and pulled her, she tried to shield Subaru’s body and vitals. As a result of which, was exposed to the concentrated light——

Subaru: “——Hk.”

“Anastasia”: “…I, see. That child, is truly, like that.”

It seemed that even Echidna’s imagination had gotten an idea of the words he had been unable to continue. Subaru could not possibly refute her husky, sighing voice.

Subaru, bleeding and wailing in agony, had been unable to even exchange a final few words with the young girl, who had seemingly melted away—— However, merely her final expression, he did possess in his memories.

Eyes seemingly relieved, seemingly loving and cherishing Subaru.

That far too convenient expression for Subaru, had been Beatrice’s end.

And if that was so, then “Natsuki Subaru”, who had made her disappearing self make that expression, should vanish from this world without leaving the slightest trace behind.

And due to the process of elimination after Beatrice’s disappearance, Subaru had escaped by dragging Echidna with him, the latter still breathing.

As if for atonement, as if for redemption, or perhaps in an effort to be rightfully punished by the offender.

And Subaru’s such actions, were restrained by the feebly breathing Echidna. Telling him that it would be pointless for him to do this, she, who had been so enthused about returning Anastasia’s body.

That too was a matter of course—— both of her legs had been blown off from the roots.

“Anastasia”: “————”

At this point, she had almost stopped bleeding.

Pulling the body he felt to be lighter than even Beatrice’s, in a state where she had not received any immediate medical attention, what kind of a future must be awaiting her.

Subaru: “Ugh, ahk!”

When such thoughts filled his mind, Subaru stumbled upon the debris, and collapsed at that very spot. At the same time, Echidna, whom he was dragging along, was also thrown down onto the aisle and toppled over.

Momentarily, merely the wails of two people, seemingly cursing the entire world, echoed through the aisle.

“Anastasia”: “It hurts… Ah, it really, hurts. The human body, truly, hurts…”

Subaru: “M-my bad… Sorry, sorry… No, rather than that, I…”

“Anastasia”: “Do not apologize, sincerely, Natsuki-kun. Also… I, no longer have any face to show Ana… This pain, is my sole, repayment to Ana.”

Subaru: “Re, payment…?”

Remaining collapsed on the ground, Echidna assented, unable to even move her body, as Subaru shook his eyes, unable to comprehend the words she had spoken.

Just what, did repayment mean. Looking at Subaru’s puzzled expression, Echidna said “After all, isn’t that so?” by loosely opening her mouth slightly.

“Anastasia”: “If I, return this body to Ana now… she would have to taste, this doomed pain, and the fear of death… That would be, hell. I should be the one, to taste it alone.”

Subaru: “Ah, ugh…”

“Anastasia”: “Unable to return this body to Ana for her sake, and unable to assist Julius… It is fitting, for me to fall, into hell like this.”

He could understand that emotions of self-derision and self-reproach were vehemently scorching Echidna’s heart.

Even Subaru was able to grasp that Echidna’s lifeless eyes; after having recited this, she had commenced counting down to her gradually approaching “Death”.

Without having done a single thing, the powerless, insouciant, incompetent oneself.

With those regrets, Echidna would die—— She would die, leaving Subaru behind.

Subaru: “Wai… Hk.”

“Anastasia”: “Please don’t, think about making it… easy, okay? I am, yeah, fine like this…”

Dreading Echidna’s fading life force, Subaru raised his voice first. However, her words suddenly bestowed a new choice upon Subaru, who had been unable to do anything.

——He would, make it easy. His actions, at this point, were far too slow to call it a comforting death, yet, assisting her by shortening the time of suffering and hastening her “Death” was something even he was capable of.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru forced his agonizing body to stand up before Echidna’s sidelong glance, as she breathed lightly, faintly, and he picked up a broken piece of the crumbled aisle, confirming its weight.

Of a size which could be grabbed with a palm, about the size of a fist at maximum. However, even this could surely serve as a weapon for taking away the life of a young girl on the verge of death.

Subaru: “…Echidna.”

“Anastasia”: “————”

Keeping the piece of rubble in his hand, Subaru called Echidna’s name and got on his knees beside her, and denied her condition.

Not a response, she did not even open her eyelids. But, it could be understood from her expression that she was not unconscious, having faintly stiffened her cheeks and pursed her lips.

She perhaps no longer had any willpower left to even stop him.

Should Subaru raise the piece of rubble overhead and swing it down energetically, her life would be taken easily.

Meili: “Smashing someone’s head with a stone, even I haven’t done something like thiiis.”

So heard Subaru, the echoing sweet voice of the young girl within his mind as he held the piece of rubble in his hand. However, this action was not for the sake of reading the Book of the Dead.

That might happen in terms of results, but as of this moment, Subaru did not have that in mind whatsoever.

He was being, a suicide assistant. A suicide assistant[176], for the sake of making someone's parting, who was already on the verge of dying, as comfortable as possible.

If someone had the right to take away that life, then surely this moment alone was sincerely——

This was the sole opportunity of atonement for Subaru, who happened to be present here, for Natsuki Subaru, who no longer was capable of doing anything.

It was the sole opportunity, and yet——

Subaru: "————"

His hand, trembled. The depths of his eyelids called out to agony, his throat forgot respiration and ossified.

Raise it overhead, swing it down. An exceedingly easy action. The present Subaru, was unable to do that. His body would not move, as if he had forgotten how to move his body.

Subaru: "…Ah."

Spilling out a husky sigh, the piece of rubble fell to the aisle's floor, giving rise to a report.

Conceding defeat to that report and his powerless knees, Subaru crumbled down at that spot.

Subaru: "…No way."

Can't you even do something so simple, Natsuki Subaru.

[176] The wording here, "kaishaku" (介錯), is role played by a person appointed to assist with the ritual of *seppuku* to behead the head of the one performing suicide, therefore preventing prolonged suffering. For more information, see here.

Swinging down a weapon for the sake of making it easy for someone in suffering and heading towards death, are you not capable of even that deceit.

Atonement of mere words, guilt which was merely an expedient, if that's wrong, then how would you explain this dilemma?

"Anastasia": "…Natsuki-kun."

Subaru: "I, am…"

"Anastasia": "For helping, with suicide, you… can't even, clasp a stone…"

Raising her thin eyelids, powerless pale cerulean eyes looked at Subaru, who was knelt down, and whispered. Thinking that weak voice, akin to a sigh, had put Subaru's weakness to blame, he halted breathing.

However, as Subaru drew back his body, Echidna unsuitably loosened her lips.

"Anastasia": "…Forgive me, for doubting you."

Subaru: "————"

"Anastasia": "————"

As she lost her breath, she apologized.

Echidna, apologized to him. She apologized, for having doubted Natsuki Subaru.

——And before he could ascertain her true intent, she died.

Killing Meili and hiding her corpse, acting without saying that he had lost his memories, continuously piling up nothing but others' doubts, escaping out of the ice cage he had been trapped in, unable to fulfill the wish entrusted onto him, protected by the young girl who tried to save his heart, and finally, unable to stain his hands with blood for the sake of the dying young girl, as Subaru knelt down in his own disgrace, Echidna apologized to him and died.

Subaru: "————"

He wanted to die.

He wanted to forget everything that had happened just now, and die.

He wanted people all over the world to point their fingers towards Natsuki Subaru, saying that he deserved to die, and that he deserved to be sentenced to death penalty. Natsuki Subaru despaired upon oneself, that he had committed a sin befitting of that.

He, despaired.

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Despair feasted upon and eroded away Natsuki Subaru's heart.

Subaru: "————"

He could not move. He had no right to move. Nothing good would happen even if he moved.

It had been proved. Natsuki Subaru had proved his own incompetence—— No, calling it incompetence would be rather cute. Instead of that, furthermore, Natsuki Subaru had proved that he was a jinx, a pest, an angel of death.

Subaru: "————"

Should despair nest into one's chest, kill one's heart, what would be eaten to ruin even before one's life would one's soul.

If that happened, then no longer would it remain possible to stand up. No longer, would it be possible to fight against anyone. Should he realize that he himself was the genuine source of anguish without being able to defy it whatsoever, it was a natural consequence.

I want to disappear. I want to vanish.

Should've decided much earlier. Before things turned to this, in this different world. Should have known, must have known before coming to a place like this different world.

Why, do you trouble other people's hearts by simply existing?

There's no way you could ever have the right to solely occupy a part of others' hearts, no matter how small it may be. You filthy wall stain. You, an existence like the dust accumulated in the corner of a room, like the maggots which swarm over a pile of pure garbage, like a scar which never disappears located in an eye-catching spot.

Natsuki Subaru, why won't you die?

Even after dying, all that awaits is redoing? Who decided that? Who made sure, that it would continue eternally? If once isn't enough, then die ten times, die a hundred times.

Die until you disappear.

Die until you vanish from anyone and everyone's memories, until you're no longer able to affect anything at all, until your name, your existence, your vestiges no longer remain in the hearts of anyone.

——I love you.

Shut up. Disappear. Erase me.

——I love you, I love you, I love you.

Keep quiet. Don't talk to me. Don't get in my way of disappearing. I want to disappear, just disappear.

——I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you.

I want to die. I want to disappear. I want to be smashed to pieces. I don't want to leave a single trace. I want to become something which never existed. I want to erase my existence. I want to disappear from history. I want to disappear from memories. I want to disappear from remembrances. I want to disappear even for the girl who said she won't forget. I'm worthless. I'm meaningless. I won't leave anything behind. I don't have anything worthy of leaving behind. All, anything, everything, disappear, vanish away from this world.

——I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you I

love you I love you I love you I

Arc 6 Chapter 54 – Re: Starting Life in a Different World from Zero

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 23, Chapter 6 “Re: ZERO -Life Starts in Another World-”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism) — Complete

——The world was about to be painted in darkness.

Sitting down devoid of any strength, the shadow stretched out its countless hands towards the motionless Subaru.

Just like spirals, or a whirlpool, the pitch-black hands were trying to wrap Natsuki Subaru along with his soul into its clutches.

The places where he was touched, like melting, like crumbling, like coming apart; he knew that his very being was going to go hollow.

But, strangely enough, he could not feel anything unpleasant at all.

Subaru: “————”

His body was going to crumble as far as he could see, his very being was going to be overwritten, his soul was going to be churned up.

While being inflicted with what perhaps was the greatest blasphemy that could be done to a living thing, Natsuki Subaru’s mind was quiet enough to say that he was at peace.

Though, the effects of the disappointment from before rested heavily in the depths of his heart.

But, it was not just that—— Since it was just this shadow, its shadowy tendrils which were steadfast-true.

It was only this shadow that showed consideration for Natsuki Subaru's emotions, who wanted to vanish and disappear even now.

I want to die. I want to vanish. I want to fall apart, I want to be trampled over, I want to be reduced to ashes, leaving nothing behind.

Even if I am to revive over and over again, come erase my body down into ashes.

This black shadow would grant such a desirable prayer, this black shadow would grant what Subaru had earnestly cried out for.

——I love you.

Just repeating these words ad nauseum was irritating.

Even if he plugged up his ears and closed his mind, it put its fingers in the gaps of his closed mind, and slid them in from the opened gaps, directly whispering its love.

——I love you. I love you. I love you.

Stop this, I am fed up.

No matter how many times you repeat this, I goddamn know already. I… don't love you. I… don't love myself. I knew about being loved. I knew it all too well.

It was his parents. Both his mother and father loved Subaru from the depths of their heart.

He knew that. As if he could not know. And so, that was why Subaru wanted to disappear.

Despite being loved by his parents, he definitely could not love himself, that which had no worth in being loved.

——I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.

Stop it, give me a break. Enough already.

No matter how many times you repeat this, you can't get anything more than this. I came to this conclusion a while ago already. I knew it. And despite knowing, I just turned my eyes away from it.

The people who were concerned about Subaru for dear life, with such desperation, all of them could not possibly be bad people.

He knew that. He couldn't not know that. So, Subaru should have just died.

He should have endeavored to not be illuminated by the compassion of those bothered by Subaru's very existence.

——I love you. I love you.

Stop it, I said I know.

If I endure this torture until the end, will you grant my wish? Will you swallow me and break me and pulverize me, and erase me into oblivion, so that I may never presume on another ever again?

If you can do that—— if you can do that, I will accept it. I want to accept it. If this is the end.

If this could be made into the end, then Natsuki Subaru, even if he would disappear——

——I love you. I love you.

???: "——That's enough."

I love you. I love you.

——

————

—————————

A voice, chimed.

It seemed just like the confession of love that was being whispered endlessly into his ears.

A voice reminiscent of a silver bell arose, piercing through the confessions of love that were painting over Natsuki Subaru's existence and the world itself. It pierced right through and reached down towards Subaru.

Subaru: "————"

A light gushed out.

It pierced right into the pitch-black shadowy appendages that was swallowing Subaru up. A shockwave was generated, the magical hand that had received the direct hit was snapped off and torn away, but that was just one from a countless number of them.

It was just one amongst thousands that had been cut down, that effort meant absolutely nothing to the hostility coming from that enormous, powerful mass of shadows. But even so, the person who had let loose that blow stepped forward with determination, dodging, evading, avoiding the evil arms of the shadow that were launched towards them, with exceptional agility, and then——

???: "——Subaru!"

Subaru: "——Hk."

Calling out Subaru's name as he sat slumped down, the owner of the voice that was ever so reminiscent of a silver bell grasped his feeble hand. Subaru's body was pulled up abruptly and she took him away from that spot with all her strength.

As if to say she would not allow them to do that, the shadow stretched out its arms, blocking their front and rear, trying to block off both their path forwards and their path of escape.

However, even with that obstacle in front of their eyes, her legs went forwards without stopping.

???: "Ryaa!!"

One hand gripping Subaru's own, sticking out her free hand, a dazzling light was born there.

And immediately afterwards, a beautiful crystal of ice appeared, shining brightly—— it was the very same kind as that of the ice cage which had kept Subaru confined. It was a mesmerizing, valiant riposte of ice.

It mowed down the pitch-black tendrils that had expanded so to make a wall in front of them, and forcibly wrenched open their path.

Witnessing the instant of the shadow being washed away, Subaru, who had harbored the impression that the strange shadow would devour everything in its path, could only feel that the heart which he had thought would remain forever unbeating had started to tremble again.

And, as his then frozen heart began to stir, his eyes also turned to face the beautiful face right beside him.

The long silver hair of the girl glittered like the moonlight as she held Subaru's hand, looking straight in front, taking him along, running away.

Though her survival was also confirmed, in his heart, he was not excited by this.

Quite the opposite in fact, in the depths of Subaru's skull, he felt like something was going to crack.

Of course he could not be delighted by his survival.

The people he had made sure were alive, Julius, Beatrice, Echidna, he had let them all die.

Though he had not witnessed the end with his own eyes, he could only imagine that things had gone south with what had happened when leaving Julius behind down there, with the Witchbeasts and Reid. Beatrice had faded away protecting Subaru, and even easing Echidna's suffering while on the brink of death was something he had been unable to do.

Natsuki Subaru was pestilence personified. Death was intrinsic to his very being.

As his own death was shaped into nothingness, could not, he imposed that misfortune upon everyone around him, he was such a being, that couldn't help but conjure to mind such a ridiculous metaphor, its poster-child ensconced in such a pitch-black fate——

Subaru: "——Enough already."

Emilia: “Huh?”

Subaru: “I said there’s no use even struggling on anymore.”

Subaru forcibly stopped moving his feet, struggling against Emilia pulling him along by his arm. And still, Emilia tried to pull Subaru’s arm, though Subaru, now possessing grit determination, did not allow this.

Although the disparity in their strength was evident, Subaru’s determination still remained steadfast. As if noticing that dark urge from the depths of his dark irises, Emilia let out a gulp and stopped pulling his arm with all her strength.

Emilia & Subaru: “————”

The two of them, Subaru and Emilia, were at a standoff. Both of them were staring at each other.

Looking at their surroundings, there were no signs of the shadow that had tried to engulf Subaru. Had it been shaken off him while escaping together with Emilia? If that was the case, then wouldn’t they still come across it again if they turned back?

It seemed as if that thing was the best way of completely erasing Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “Why did you come and save me? You must be out of your mind. You thought I was a fake as well… So you could’ve just locked me in that ice cage and tried to kill me.”

These words were purposefully deceptive, twisting the truth at will, each word spoken maliciously opening more wounds.

So as to never think, that Emilia would once again take his hand.

However, to Emilia, who saw only the truth when looking, Subaru’s despicable tactic was futile.

Her eyes narrowed in anger, and she raised her voice at Subaru.

Emilia: “I’m not trying to kill you! I just wanted to hear your side of the story, as there was something unusual about Subaru. And since you hadn’t told us about your missing memories, we…”

Subaru: “And what of it! That may’ve been just something for my own convenience! Did you believe it that easily!? You sure look stupid. You’ve gone crazy! You, Julius, and Beatrice!”

He had been locked up in the ice cage, and he had told them the truth about having amnesia like he had been in desperation.

No one who possessed the ability to think should have believed such words. Ram and Echidna’s attitude had been the correct one. And yet, despite that, more than half of the others were stupid.

Subaru: “No, NO… Everyone’s stupid. In the end… with things like this, in the end, even Echidna apologized to me… I don’t get it!”

Emilia: “In the end, Echidna…? Subaru, what happened? Are Echidna and the others…”

Emilia begun to ask that question to Subaru, the latter muttering and groaning with his face covered by his own hands. Even with how worried she looked, he would be digging his nails into that beautiful girl’s heart.

It was because of that, that Subaru was letting all of his own emotional scars as if made of glass.

Even her lifeblood had bled out, leaving behind only an expression of fragility, a feeling that keeping those existences which mattered from feeling pain would be a blessing, achieving only such a heart-wrenching, desolate desire, in the figure of a young girl who had lost her life.

As the thoughts revived in his mind, Subaru let out a scream in an attempt to let the wounds he had in the depths of his heart spread open.

Subaru: “Dead! Echidna is dead! Both of her legs were blown off, and she bled out in pain… In short, she died in anguish! Beatrice as well!”

Emilia: “——Hk.”

Subaru: “That girl even, protected me… What an absurd thing, cutting off its own tail… If only I’d noticed earlier. But I didn’t, and so she died. She said she wouldn’t forget me…”

Even if Subaru had forgotten, Beatrice would not forget.

Beatrice had firmly declared that she would help Subaru regain his memories without fail.

However, she had perished. Straight after she had said that.

It was all bark and no bite. Words were wind. And immediately after she had spoken this.

She had kept Subaru away from death. And with a face full of relief, she had vanished from this world.

Subaru: “If she was going to disappear like that, I should’ve stopped her. I took her out? I took her away? Whatever, how it happened doesn’t matter.... At any rate, if I took her from anywhere other than here… I never should have. If I hadn’t, then…”

Then things would not have ended with her meeting that fate, vanishing with that expression on her face.

Subaru: “That’s right, that Julius guy too. Surely, around about now, he must already be… In a place with so many scary Witchbeasts, and with that Reid guy inconveniencing him… and then being all like, «Go, please»… What idiocy.”

Everyone here was an idiot. What on earth were they expecting?

Entreating, taking back, having apologized for doubting him, what on earth were they spouting out?

What would become of their request? What would the meaning be in taking them back? Wasn’t it natural for them to doubt him?

Natsuki Subaru was here because he betrayed everything that hung over him.

Survive and have some peace and quiet alone; since that was unbearable, he wanted to disappear and die.

He was the most idiotic, stupid, utterly helpless, he could not save anything——

If those were not Natsuki Subaru, then just what would they be——

Emilia: “——Me and Subaru met for the first time at a place called the Loot House in the Royal Capital.”

——

————

————————

Subaru: “————”

Subaru had sunk to a bottomless swamp of self-blame and self-doubt with no escape; he could not even move his own body.

Emilia’s sudden confession had made Subaru’s eardrums throb—— her words had come out as if bringing fond, precious, nostalgic memories back to her.

Subaru: “…Huh?”

Receiving those words devoid of context so abruptly, Subaru was dumbfounded, all he could do was let go of his breath in his lungs.

In no way was this meant to scorn or mock her sudden actions. Subaru’s consciousness simply could not keep up to that degree, and was genuinely stunned into silence.

And yet, Emilia ignored Subaru’s reaction, proffering down a finger as she allowed more memories to resurface.

Emilia: “Back then, Felt-chan stole a reaaally important insignia from me. I was in a mad rush with Puck to try and get it back… And then, after we pursued her, we fought against Meili’s onee-san. We were in grave danger, but Reinhard came to save us. And after that, just as I breathed a sigh of relief, Meili’s onee-san went straight for me… Subaru saved me from that.”

Subaru: “————”

Emilia: “That was when I first met with Subaru… Don’t you remember it?”

Hearing her question, Subaru shook his head.

Even though she had recited those memories in detail, he had no knowledge of even a small bit of what she had said.

It was to be expected, of course. Those were the memories of Emilia and "Natsuki Subaru". No matter what, those were bits of memories spun by "Natsuki Subaru", who kept behaving in ways unimaginable to him——

Emilia: "But, Subaru protected me causing him serious injuries, so I brought you back with me to Roswaal's mansion. And there, while she complained, Beatrice treated your wounds. Ram and… surely even Rem got on well with Subaru."

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "And then, without her onee-san, Meili acted wickedly and spurred on the attack of some Witchbeasts. Subaru and Ram held them back until Roswaal finished them off, I stayed in the mansion… it was when you'd also promised to take me on a *daaaayte*… Don't you remember it?"

Subaru: "————"

He shook his head. He did not remember it. He had never done such things. He never had.

Emilia: "And you know, we did so many things in the mansion. We made mayonnaise, we drank alcohol with everyone, Puck made it snow, we played the King's *Gaaayme*…[177] and after that, I was called to the Royal Capital for the Royal Selection, right?"

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "It was also the first time I ever had a big fight with Subaru. I didn't want Subaru to get hurt anymore, nor make you overdo things, and I was scared and didn't understand why you were so kind to me. So, I thought that everything would've come to an end when we fought…"

As she recounted these memories, Emilia's voice started to faintly tremble.

[177] This little passage is referencing events that took place in the timeskip between Arcs 2 and 3, which were elaborated upon in several Side Stories, either published on Narou (where the Web Novel Chapters are posted), or released as special extra content for Light Novel volume releases. These are, in order, Withdrawal Symptoms (TL Link)/Mayonnaise Scramble (TL Link), mentioned in the Memory Snow OVA; Alcohol Panic (TL Link), adapted into the Memory Snow OVA; Some Like It Cold (TL Link), adapted into the Memory Snow OVA; and King Chapter (TL Link).

There was a mixture of joy and sorrow, anxiety and expectation; various conflicting emotions. Subaru was assailed by a feeling of being completely parched.

Unbearable, unbearable, unbearable was this yearning scorching his chest.

For the sake of Emilia revealing this expression in its entirety—— no, for this single reason, that yearning was unbearable.

Emilia: “I didn’t understand what was happening, at the time I was being swept away by the uneasy situation, and then Subaru came running back to me when I was my most depressed, and after that…”

Subaru: “————”

Emilia: “And after that, what was it that you said…? Do you remember it?”

Subaru: “I don…”

I don’t remember.

It did not come out. They really were not going to come out.

The trembling of Emilia’s voice, her appeal, her echoing voice that clung onto him, all of these made it evident.

The Subaru that was here now was not the “Natsuki Subaru” that she wanted.

Having this obvious fact thrust before him, Subaru broiled in envy and jealousy towards himself.

Why is it you, “Natsuki Subaru”?

You and I, why are we so different, “Natsuki Subaru”?

Emilia, and everyone thought like this.

Return the real “Natsuki Subaru”. The you, the Natsuki Subaru right now, just drop dead.

For how much longer will it be you the one present in this place?

Such should they be thinking, hurting, suffering, lamenting.

And yet——

Emilia: "——But, I remember everything. I remember what Subaru promised me, and what Subaru told me, and what Subaru's done. I remember everything."

Joy and hope were lodged in that smile, so that both sadness and anxiety would never have been there.

Seeing Emilia's smile, Subaru's lips trembled.

There was, nothing. It was, nowhere.

Everything he had said, everything he had done, everything he had promised.

Inside of this body, inside of this head, inside of this heart, at the depths of his soul, there was nothing. And so, he said——

Subaru: "I don't remember. I don't even remember it. Who are you… Who are you!? Who are all of you!? WHO ARE YOU ALL TALKING ABOUT!?"

He exploded.

Some time ago, with Beatrice and Echidna, he had let himself burst into a fit of emotions, and once again, he also shouted this here.

Emilia: "————"

Faced with his bellow, Emilia widened her amethyst eyes.

All the while still gazing at her, Subaru rapidly blinked his eyes, clearing away the hot tears that had welled up there, with an even dirtier voice which strove to preserve a malicious tone, he continued to bellow,

Subaru: "Putting your life on the line for someone else's sake! Springing into action straight away for someone else's sake! Running so to give it your all, for someone else's sake! Accomplishing something by risking my life for someone else's sake! Can there be such things!? Can I do such things!?"

To hear all of her recollections, and reply that he could not remember.

Unable to answer Beatrice's question before she vanished, still bearing that regret in his heart, he would listen to Emilia gently, almost convincingly, talk about her memories.

Julius had entrusted in him, Beatrice had believed in him, Echidna had forgiven him, Emilia desired him.

All of that for "Natsuki Subaru". The one that had been summoned to this parallel world, the real him——

Subaru: "——Don't joke about! Such a guy cannot be Natsuki Subaru!"

There was no way that someone could entrust their wishes to Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: "I know all too well! About how pathetic, and disgusting, and helpless, and what a rotten bastard Natsuki Subaru is!"

There was no way that anyone could believe in Natsuki Subaru, in his heart.

Subaru: "Who are you actually looking at!? What are you talking about!? Such a guy is nowhere to be seen! Everything is a downright lie! The things that guy showed, the things that guy said, everything, everything! It was just random crap that he spouted out from his mouth! There's no value in believing in it!"

There was no way that someone could pardon Natsuki Subaru from his sins.

Subaru: "You think there's any value in Natsuki Subaru!? Natsuki Subaru's scum! He's a useless rotten bastard! I know this better than anyone else!!"

Like hell anyone would want Natsuki Subaru to be beside them.

Subaru: "————"

There was no worth. There was no worth or anything to be desired anywhere.

Natsuki Subaru was pestilence personified. No matter whom it may be, everything just amounted to wounds, loss and death.

Thus, let's end it.

Emilia, and everyone else needed not get hurt anymore because of that guy.

Subaru: "… It doesn't have to be, me."

He merely did mutter those words.

It did not have to be himself—— no, it would be way better if it was not Natsuki Subaru.

Why did they entrust things to a man who could not do anything. Why did they believe in him. Why did they forgive him. Why did they desire him.

There should be more ways for them to manage things better. There should be someone else to help them manage things better.

Even if that someone was the "Natsuki Subaru" that everyone wished for, he was nowhere to be found anymore.

"Natsuki Subaru" was a pretense that he never possessed from the beginning. A vain being.

Subaru: "Someone like me, just disregard and toss me away. Someone smarter than me, someone stronger than me will turn up. I'm…"

He said that he could not do anything. It was just this sense of sheer helplessness that overwhelmed Natsuki Subaru.

Everyone had their lot in life. One appropriate to them. He wanted everyone to understand that. Subaru was unqualified to walk next to Emilia and the others. He was unqualified to be desired by them.

He was neither strong nor smart. They needed not desire to have such a Subaru around.

Therefore, he would——

Emilia: "——My name is Emilia. Just Emilia."

Subaru: "——Huh?"

Having spat out his sheer sense of helplessness, with his heart dominated by the things he wanted to spit out as he spiraled towards hollowness, the bell-like voice rang out, like a surprise attack, causing him to let out a sound.

Subaru: "————"

He did not understand the meaning of those words—— No, not the meaning. It was her intention that he did not comprehend.

Lifting his head, Subaru looked at the person who had introduced herself as Emilia standing right in front of him. She had her hand on top of her ample chest. Within her big, round, amethyst eyes, Subaru could see his own figure reflected.

His breath was taken away by their shimmer. Emilia continued onwards with her speech, right in front of Subaru.

Emilia: "There are so many things I have to tell you, and so many things I have to ask you. Many, many, many things. But, right now I have to hear just one thing."

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "Julius, Beatrice, and Echidna. And now, I've taken you by the hand, by running away together… I wanted to protect you at any cost, I didn't want you to die, so by doing that…"

Emilia closed her eyes, and plunged into thought, full of emotion.

After a few seconds, she broke off her speech. He could see that various emotions were coursing through her chest. These even included her feelings of anxiety for her companions who were not present here.

Emilia's cherry-colored lips quivered with those emotions fresh in her mind,

Emilia: "You, who have made us feel that way, who are you?"

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "Please—— let me hear your name."

At Emilia's question, the very depths of his heart shook within his chest.

The manifestation of her intentions were not to deny the Natsuki Subaru in front of her eyes or to recover the old Subaru.

——They were an affirmation of Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: "————"

"The one before us is a fake, return the real Natsuki Subaru to us", words along those lines, behavior along those lines, resentment along those lines, would have been easier to bear.

Because, it was nothing other than something Subaru had desired himself.

He still preferred the side of those who said that the him standing in front of their eyes was a fake, that they wanted him to return "Natsuki Subaru". The ones who said that to him, the ones who wished that from him, the ones who tormented him with that, he still preferred their side.

But, it was Emilia that—— no, not just her.

Up until here, everyone who had spoken to Natsuki Subaru had implored the same thing.

Irrespective of whether he was strong or weak.

Thus, even if he let himself be seen so shamefully, and could not help forgetting everything, he still had not changed.

By their words, by their behavior, by their life, they showed their need for Natsuki Subaru——

Subaru: "…Why?"

Emilia: "————"

Subaru: "Why are you here, Natsuki Subaru? What can that guy do? What do you expect from him…?"

He did not understand it.

In this, in just this overwhelming despair, in their helpless numerical inferiority, what would happen if Natsuki Subaru was there? In what way would the situation improve? Could they break through this?

Subaru: “A weak, dumb, miserable, spineless guy, what do you even see in him?”

Emilia: “——Maybe it’s as you say.”

Emilia cast her eyes down at Subaru entreating her with this rather than denying, shaking her head begrudgingly.

Her eyes were bordered by long eyelashes, her voice ever so reminiscent of a silver bell tickled his heart; everything about Emilia seemed to be a linchpin that tied Natsuki Subaru to this world.

Yet, despite that sort of out-of-place, powerful emotion, certainly one connected to Subaru’s heart, Emilia continued.

Emilia: “There are plenty of people stronger than Subaru, and surely there are many people smarter than Subaru. But, I prefer to be with you, Subaru, no matter what time. I believe that Subaru will do so for me, thus do I wish. After all…”

Subaru: “————”

Emilia: “After all, if you’re going to help me anyways, having it be—— someone I like, would make me so, so much happier than someone who just does it because they’re there and can.”

And, whilst smiling, Emilia said this.

Whilst smiling and with her cheeks slightly blushing, she said this.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru took a breath, as if gasping.

Having received Emilia’s words, in that instant, surely all time had stopped within his body.

With a *bad-ump*, *bad-ump*, he could feel his heart pounding.

And at the same time in which his feelings boiled up from with him, another emotion rose up; scorn towards “Natsuki Subaru”.

Subaru: “——Haa.”

I see, “Natsuki Subaru”. Did you fall in love with this beautiful girl?

Someone who is probably way out of your league. As if such a young woman would even give you the time of the day.

Such a cool Knight, such a wise woman, such a sweet little girl.

And finally, such a beautiful girl right in front of his eyes.

Entrusting to you, believing in you, forgiving you, wishing it were you.

Not asking you to be a savior, nor even expecting you to be a savior, merely, if those staggering walls had to be crossed, rather than someone capable, just wishing it were you.

Emilia: “——My name is Emilia. Just Emilia.”

Once again, Emilia gave the silent Subaru her name.

She looked over towards him with her amethyst eyes. Subaru’s dark-brown eyes gazed back at those eyes right in front of him. And then——

Emilia: “——Please. Let me hear your name.”

Subaru: “I am…”

He hesitated forming his words, hearing Emilia’s question once again.

He had denied it over and over again.

He could not do it. He could not do it. He could not be it. He had repeatedly denied it.

So, this was surely nothing more than convenient wordplay.

——Entrusted, believed in, forgiven, desired.

In this desert's Tower, what if there were the qualifications to be treated like that by them?

In this desert's Tower, what if there was someone that could save Emilia and the others?

If that was "Natsuki Subaru", then if that "Natsuki Subaru" was nowhere to be found.

Subaru: "——My name is, Natsuki Subaru."

Emilia: "————"

Subaru: "Entrusted by Julius, believed in by Beatrice, forgiven by Echidna, desired by Emilia[178]… by you. If that man's name is Natsuki Subaru, then…"

The black-haired boy answered the young woman with the glimmering silver hair, staring with his dark-brown eyes into her amethyst ones.

To the question that had quivered from her cherry-colored lips, his blood-stained lips answered back.

Subaru: "——I AM NATSUKI SUBARU."

Right now, feeble, without strength, mind and body wracked by despair, but still he declared it.

For Emilia, for Emilia and everyone else, for you, for you and everyone else, for their safety, for peace and quiet, thus did he wish, thus did he implore.

Emilia: "————"

Subaru had strongly declared it.

In his heart, he had not fully wiped away the pieces of distrust towards "Natsuki Subaru".

[178] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Desired throughout this chapter is like in the «implored» or «wished» sense, not sexually before anyone gets any ideas". Adding on to that, is the expression used by Emilia in "someone I like" (好きな人) which can even be translated as "the one I love" depending on context.

Illustration from Volume 23, coloring by Norvak (source)

Even now, the one that had caused "*my*" death had not departed Subaru's mind—— no, the face and voice of that wicked man, Meili's death. Perhaps the time where it would be wiped away would never come.

But, that was okay. Even so, that was okay.

It was not like he wanted to be saved. It was not like he would cling on them, wishing to be saved either.

I want you all to be saved, he thought.

I want to help you all, he implored.

——If that can be done by "Natsuki Subaru", then I will do it.

The reason you started running, the destination you set out for better be the same.

So long as the road envisioned is the same, then we're just bitter enemies in the same boat; even if I hate you, I will not complain.

Let me, let "Natsuki Subaru" save Emilia and the others.

Subaru: "Thank you, Emilia—— You made me believe in that."

Emilia: "——Subaru, I am…"

With Subaru's reply, ripples rose within Emilia's amethyst eyes.

Her lips quivering, Emilia started to somehow string together some words towards Subaru, who had defined himself as such.

It occurred right afterwards.

Subaru: "——Hk."

Up until then, nothing had disturbed the two of them talking. The situation which had until now remained peaceful, cracked in an instant.

Subaru: "——Emilia!"

Near them, the aisleway where the two had been conversing was in a flash crushed and pulverized by a shadow.

The aisleway lost its shape, and Emilia, losing her balance, lost her footing. Facing her, Subaru, having barely clung onto his foothold, kicked against the floor with force.

At that moment, the Tower lost its shape, smashed up and weathered. Perishing next to lumps of stone cladded in the aroma of sand.

Subaru immediately dived towards Emilia who had started to fall. The distance shrunk, catching up to her silver hair still lingering above, and finally he closed his arms around her slender body.

Emilia: “Subaru… Hk!”

As he clutched her slender, soft, warm body, Emilia stirred, calling out Subaru’s name. She was probably trying to change her position in his arms, trying to put herself lower.

And because of that, the one that helped and the one being helped had been reversed.

Emilia, and everyone else, were truly nuts. But alas, Emilia’s effort had been completely useless in this situation.

Emilia, with her back to the ground, unable to see where she was falling to, probably had not gotten the swing of things.

It was neither the hard floor of the Tower, nor the sprawling Sand Dunes outside that would come to meet Subaru and her. It would be the pitch-black shadows wrapping this Tower that would lead to the end of everything.

So, the two of them would end up being swallowed by the shadow whilst embracing each other just like that.

——No, the opposite.

This surely would become the beginning.

That which they had started once, he would start once again right here, from the end, anew.

For that reason, he would make a promise.

Right here, in this world, in this place, he would make the words he exchanged with Emilia real.

Having been saved, having wished of wanting to save them.

It was time start from the end, holding all of that. The time for sputtering and babbling was over.

Infatuation like a curse is nice, isn't it? It's what I always wanted.

He did not know whether Natsuki Subaru was worthy of being loved.

But, since the requirements needed to be loved by Emilia, by Emilia and everyone else, were there.

Even if they still forget, even if they… even if they don't remember the words they told me, in this ending world, in this world beginning anew.

Even if they still forget, even if they… even if they don't remember the words that I struck in you all, in this ending world, in this world beginning anew.

I will remember. I will remember everything. Because even now, even if I have to cling onto them, I will not forget them.

Subaru: "Even if you forget—— I will not forget any of you."

——Always remember, Natsuki Subaru.

The shadow drew ever closer, its darkness engulfing Emilia and Subaru.

Just like that, Emilia, and Natsuki Subaru were sinking, sinking towards the depths of the shadows.

Metempsychosis, everything was coming apart, everything was becoming zero, the end was coming as expected.

And, it began in the place where everything became zero.

——A battle to kill Natsuki Subaru, and bring back “Natsuki Subaru”, commenced[179].

[179] Despite this being frequently called the “series title-drop chapter”, the title of this Chapter and the title of the series are slightly different. The difference is in the verb that corresponds to “starting”: while the series title (Re: ゼロから始める異世界生活) uses the transitive verb, “始める”, read “hajimeru”, the chapter title (Re: ゼロから始まる異世界生活) uses the intransitive verb, “始まる”, read “hajimaru”. Much thanks to @LoremIpsumVerb/Ice_Occultism for the clarification (source found here).

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シャウラ先生

Web Novel Volume 24

Author Nagatsuki Tappei
Illustrator Otsuka Shinichirou
Translators
Witch Cult Translations
Web Novel
Volume
24
Re:ゼロ
Re: Life in a different world from zero
から始める異世界生活

Arc 6 Chapter 55 – You Who Awaits the Snowmelt

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 1 “Waiting for the Ice to Thaw”

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——Black, murky, distant, dense, deep, weighty, bitter darkness was what was present.

???: “————”

Coarsely, like all things negative of this world were being blended into a heterogeneous mixture, he felt such cumbrous, choking darkness thickly coiling upon his entire body.

His face, his body, his limbs, his supposed skin were all corrupted by that darkness, akin to sludge it soaked into his blood, and accompanying that was a sense of discomfort as if calling upon his thirst.

Imaginable or not, it felt as if all leftover parts of his body were covered in scabs.

His skin became taut, and its sensation, not even feeling like the skin of a human upon touch, reversed, for the fingers that would touch the scabs were covered with scabs themselves, and he lost understanding of the form of his true “self”.

——No, what he truly could not understand, was not merely his outward appearance.

???: “————”

Something further in the interior, as if his essence.

Otherwise, what should likely be named as his Soul.

Losing its form, the state of his own Soul, at the end of the repetition of this sheerly hopeless straying, he felt as if fingers were coming into view from those fragments.

With his reaction to those appearing fingers, covered in scabs as aforementioned, rendered futile, perhaps it could be said to be merely uneasiness and something greater, repugnance. As if they things someone could possibly grasp.

???: "————"

Was the "self" he sought, truly present ahead.

Before he was pulled in, the moment he had reached here, had a completely new self of his not taken shape. Though it was queer imagination, it was not something completely implausible. The truth was, the happenings within his body gave a sudden sense of abruptness inclined towards that, and brought about impracticality.

Grasping that as his own affair, accepting the trial being posed in front of him, he sought the spectacle which lay ahead of overcoming it—— for just that, just how much time had he devoted.

???: "————"

That was why, he felt a heavy sense of uneasiness.

Should he really go ahead of this point? Was the place in which he would be received, accepted, desired, truly there?

Entrustment, forgiveness, faith, wishing, his "self" which had engaged in all those, was it truly present there?

???: "——I love you."

——Such incomparable uneasiness, was melted by the voice which felt as if it was leading the way, and fading away.

???: "————"

——White, bright, tall, precious, beautiful, sweet, light was what he faced.

And that soul was, Natsuki Subaru was——

※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※

Upon that moment, Natsuki Subaru revived and reawakened his consciousness from the deepest of slumbers.

Subaru: "——Ah."

A weak sigh spilled out of his mouth at first.

It was his own voice, though husky and lacking life. But with this, he understood his mind had not been rendered to a point where he would no longer be able to even speak.

This made for a single step forward. As for the rest, he must confirm that he had not been reset to a person with entirely a different sense of values——

???: "——Are you awake, Subaru?"

Subaru: "————"

The chime of a silver bell had been observing Subaru's ear and forehead from the side, immediately close to him.

A chime refreshing, kind, peaceful and loveable.

The voice he had heard just a few moments ago whilst in a terrible condition.

His heart bounced upon hearing it now. With his chest hurting him, enduring that, Subaru slowly turned sideward.

Subaru: "————"

——What awaited there was an amethyst glimmer, with eyes dyed in concern.

Subaru: "…Emi, lia?"

Emilia: "Yeah, that's right. Subaru, are you okay? Can you get up? Are you able to speak properly?"

Subaru: “Um…”

With her name called to her, the possessor of the amethyst eyes—— Emilia wet her lips and tilted her head. Beautiful long silver hair flowed down her white shoulders. It seemed like the glow of the moon was swimming gracefully within light, her heroic beauty scorched Subaru’s heart.

——Frankly speaking, there stood a girl too beautiful to think that she was of this world.

Subaru: “Wah…”

The moment he grew conscious of that, Subaru’s blood flow rejuvenated with great vigor.

His face grew warmer, his face became redder, as he darted his eyes in all directions, rendered unable to raise his voice. Blushing so intensely that his ears nearly started hurting, he spilled out a voice saying “Ahaha, ahaha…”.

Emilia: “Ahaha…?”

Surprised by his antics, Emilia furrowed her finely-shaped eyebrows. Even the slightest of her gestures seemed like a work of art painted with extreme detail by the artist.

Witnessing this from a distance where they could feel each other’s breaths, Subaru suffered with a rapid increase of heart rate.

Subaru: “————”

What’s this? Just what was this?

Is this real? Isn’t this a mirage or an illusion? Speaking of mirages in the middle of a desert, that would be an oasis—— in other words, what you see at that moment is what you desire the most.

Then in accordance with that rule, this definitely should be a mirage. What an extravagant illusion——

Emilia: “A-Are you okay, Subaru? Something’s wrong after all. You were collapsed, after all.”

Subaru: “Bah!”

Emilia: “See, you just said «bah»!”

Subaru was caught up in a vortex of confusion, as the reversed palm on his forehead trembled.

Upon witnessing that, Emilia blinked her twinkling eyes to confirm Subaru's possible injuries, as Subaru was denied his Illusionary Emilia Theory, tasting seriousness like that of the scholar who disproved the Ptolemaic theory.

However, he certainly did feel the sensation of contact. Reality affirmed her existence.

And not only did it affirm that Emilia truly existed, but also that his self was Natsuki Subaru. And above all——

???: "——What's with this conversing while ignoring Betty, stop it, I suppose. Geez, it isn't just Emilia who's worried, in fact."

Subaru: "——Hk."

Opposite to Emilia, a young voice, seemingly displeased, echoed and turned around.

The field of vision leapt towards the turned figure, who belonged to a young girl with puffed up cheeks.

Subaru: "Beatrice…"

Beatrice: "That's quite the low voice, I suppose… As if you can't believe Betty is here, your expression speaks the same, in fact."

Accepting the faint call, Beatrice relaxed her furrowed eyebrows. Though her words were harsh, her voice had a tint of concern and relief.

The relief for Subaru waking up, and the concern for Subaru collapsing. Giving that impression, Beatrice's attitude—— no, her entire existence jolted Subaru's heart. In other words——

Beatrice: "——Nyah!?"

Grabbing Beatrice's figure, Subaru immediately pulled her light body towards his chest. Light. Her body was truly light.

Unable to resist upon his sudden action, Beatrice was completely engulfed within Subaru's arms as her eyes encircled. Atop the emerald bed covered with vines and creepers, with all his strength Subaru confirmed her existence.

Subaru: "Beatrice, Beatrice, Beatriceeeee!"

Beatrice: "W-w-w-what, I suppose!? What happened, in fact!? This is too sudden, I suppose!"

Subaru: "You, you… You really, have such a calming face! Cuteness that's seemingly welcoming someone back to their parents' home. I'll fall for you."

Beatrice: "What, that better not be a compliment, in fact!?"

Hugging her and viewing Beatrice's face, Subaru said so earnestly. Becoming redder due to his actions and words, Beatrice put her palm on Subaru's face with strength.

As the young girl's tiny fingers touched his cheek and ear, whilst tasting cute pain, Subaru truly felt the existence of the young girl named Beatrice with certainty.

Emilia: "Geez! Subaru, don't start fooling around immediately after waking up! We don't even know why you collapsed, yet…"

Feeling slightly left out, so spoke Emilia sharply towards Subaru, who was busy hugging Beatrice.

Concerned for Subaru's body, Emilia tried to grab his shoulder, but then stopped.

Emilia: "——Subaru?"

Emilia, tinted with more of concern than rage. The emotions blended within her voice changed into a single shade of worry. Her eyes, painted with surprise, were looking at Subaru whom she had tried to grasp.

The shoulder of Subaru, who was faintly trembling, and crying.

Subaru: "…Uhm, kuh."

Beatrice: “Subaru? Subaru, what happened, I suppose? Betty is right here, in fact. It’s alright, it’s alright, I suppose. You don’t have to cry, in fact.”

Noticing Subaru’s state, who let out a faint wail from his throat and wept, Beatrice erased the color of chaos from her face entirely and caressed Subaru’s cheek, stained with tears.

His faintly trembling hands were trying to release Beatrice’s young, petite body. Beatrice understood, that anxiety and fear was the cause of that.

Henceforth, Beatrice gently called out to his heart.

That he did not have to cry. That he was alright. That she was right there.

Emilia: “Don’t cry, Subaru. You don’t have to rush it. Slowly, take a deep breath, calm down. Beatrice and I, are both right here with you.”

Just like Beatrice, Emilia consoled Subaru on top of the bed.

Her hand, which had earlier halted in hesitation, now touched Subaru’s shoulder, Emilia’s voice, like the chime of a silver bell, respected Subaru’s actions and determinations.

Subaru: “————”

The two’s existences and ways did not change.

The sublime two did not change, even within a world where everything had been brought to ruin, where everything had been lost irrecoverably, they still gave precedence to others, to Subaru instead of themselves, even as they stood at the door of death.

Having confirmed that, having recognized that, this time for sure, he would work to push through.

Natsuki Subaru, in order to regain everything as “Natsuki Subaru”——

Subaru: “I’ve, returned.”

A crying voice accompanied with a disheveled attitude, though in other situations he could not have been more pathetic, more disgraceful.

——Natsuki Subaru commenced a new loop in order to rescue everything.

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Subaru: “And so, it seems that I actually lost my memories in the Library of Taygeta. I get that this may not mesh well for everyone in a lot of ways and thus quite a problem, but please understand.”

???: “————”

On the breakfast table, Subaru courteously bowed his head down before all his comrades, who were sitting in a circle.

Such explosive words of Subaru’s triggered all kinds of reactions amongst everyone. Even so, the most prominent of them, confusion, mayhem or grief, had seemingly been postponed to later.

Emilia: “Everyone is reaaally worried for Subaru. But, Subaru is utmost worried for us so…”

Ram: “…Emilia-sama may say so, but.”

By Subaru’s side, Emilia followed up with a concerned yet understanding expression.

However, Emilia’s words were viewed skeptically by Ram. She folded her own arms and glared at Subaru with her light-crimson eyes,

Ram: “Ram does not see that Barusu is the one who is utmost worried. Rather, Barusu, what is this farce?”

Subaru: “It’s not a farce. I’m speaking my heart out about my concern and the truth veeery honestly. My chest’s about to burst from the idea of being stubborn and not telling about it, considering the tragedy that brings.”

Ram: “————”

Ram’s glare became increasingly suspicious upon Subaru’s response, as he answered with a grim expression.

Emilia made a hurried response to the two's severe exchange, having heard the situation moments beforehand in the Green Room. Upon hearing about his "amnesia", Emilia and Beatrice were astonished but accepted it with concern for Subaru's safety—— the sequence followed the footsteps of what had happened previously this time as well, and he had asked her to provide backup to him whilst he opened his heart out.

——Retiring from that previously horrible environment, Natsuki Subaru now broke into an entirely new environment.

Should it be said in a stylish manner, he had determined his resolve to start life in the different world from zero once again, but of course the actual circumstance was nothing so wonderful.

It was good that he was resolved, but at that moment wherein he wished for "Death", it was possible that could have been the end for him.

Without that happening to him, and now having gotten a chance to commence again thanks to Return by Death like this, in all honesty, the relief and gratitude he felt now was insuppressible—— however, he had no intention to rely on it.

The power of Return by Death which resided within Subaru's body, was an immense power which distorted fate itself.

Though "Death" being its trigger was rough on Subaru, the user, but should it be considered compensation for distorting fate, then this would be nothing less than appropriate.

A form of compensation—— yes, Subaru thought of "Death" as naught but a form of compensation.

It was natural that a power so great would need to be compensated in some form. Of course, Subaru assumed that that was naturally the case with his Return by Death as well.

A limit on the number, or perhaps a need to sacrifice something upon recovering.

Subaru did not believe that the goddess of fate would indulge him so much as to grant him an infinite number of trials. The only experience he had of being loved by someone would only be that of loved by his parents, that would be the only case he could say so confidently.

But in that case, doing trial and error for acquiring the knowledge of the limit of Return by Death——piling up “Deaths” by his own choice would not be what he would normally choose for. It would not be strange whatsoever if this was his last chance.

And if it followed the pattern of sacrificing something, what was common was to give up on a valuable existence or cherished remembrances.

Unfortunately, for the amnesiac Subaru, the only valuable existences he had except for his family in the world he was formerly in, were only Emilia and the others also with him in the Tower.

And when he thought that far——

Subaru: “No way, the disappearance of my memories better not be a compensation for Return by Death.”

Though frightening to even think of, it was fairly possible. Sacrificing memories as compensation for Return by Death. Quite a vicious idea, but Return by Death itself was not a good act to engage in in the first place.

What was utmost frightening was that there was no way to confirm if this was the case or not.

In truth, the relationship between Subaru’s amnesia and Return by Death was completely unknown. For the moment, having realized his “amnesia”, Subaru, who had already died four times, had not affirmed his memory loss within his sphere of what all he could gain a grasp on.

His memories after his start of waking up in the Tower while on the way back from the convenience store were vivid.

——Hopefully there were not innumerable loops forgotten to memory in-between.

Ram: “——Hey, are you listening, Barusu.”

Ram’s voice, sharp like a blade, brought Subaru back to reality, after he had gotten completely lost in his thoughts. Upon her gaze, Subaru spilled out a voice from his throat saying “Wha…”,

Subaru: “Yeah, I’m listening. I know I surprised you. This is way too sudden, and I understand that you won’t believe it, but…”

Ram: “But?”

Subaru: “I…”

Beatrice: “Subaru has no reason to tell such a duplicitous lie, in fact. Ram must also be holding at least that much trust in Subaru’s plans, I suppose.”

Beatrice responded to Ram in Subaru’s stead, while he was busy choosing his words. Having heard the situation back in the Green Room, she was entirely on Subaru’s side as she now sat beside him.

Ram: “Beatrice-sama…”

Beatrice: “What Emilia said isn’t wholly false either, in fact. Having lost his memories, the one who’s the most worried is Subaru, I suppose. That’s why he was even crying like a little kid, in fact.”

Subaru: “Talking about that episode makes it so much more embarrassing.”

Subaru pushed a grin upon the unexpected revelation, and made the reason behind his tears to be “this”.

It actually was due to the fact that he had Returned by Death, that he was able to reunite with them, that he had been granted a chance to redo. Those tears had many factors to them, but tears were ultimately tears.

It was meaningless to investigate the reason behind a man’s tears.

Regardless, his gratitude to Beatrice as she now sided with him was insuppressible.

Just like Emilia, Beatrice had been confused at first upon hearing him in the Green Room, but not only did she take more time than Emilia to digest what he had said, she had promised to support him with wiseness and sensibility unbefitting her appearance.

——Reminded of the transient relief he had shown her, and the words “taking outside” which Beatrice had said at the very end last time, Subaru felt agony like his heart was being strangled by chains.

Just, what did “Natsuki Subaru” do to Beatrice?

He felt guilty relying on her faith despite not being aware of that. But he must accept it as a matter of course, he admonished himself.

Subaru: “To be honest, it would be a bit unreasonable to reject the theory of me having no reason to lie so directly about having lost my memories, but I want you to just digest that.”

Ram: “Digest that, you say…”

Subaru: “On top of that, let’s talk about something constructive. Luckily, my present self is facing forward. I’d give a large welcome to talking about advancing forward… but if you have something to say, then I’ll properly listen to it.”

Under the cover of Beatrice’s comments, Subaru said so and bowed his head once again. In order to follow up with Subaru, Emilia also bowed her head saying “Please, trust him”.

Ram: “————”

Witnessing Emilia, Beatrice and Subaru’s meek attitudes, even Ram was unable to pronounce words of rebuttal. Although, even if they made an angry response, it would only be natural and reasonable.

Of course, it had not been just Ram who had been impacted by Subaru’s avouched “amnesia”. Just because she had made the most striking reaction, the reactions of the people besides Ram—— Echidna, Julius and Shaula’s reactions, also aligned with what Subaru had already experienced twice.

Subaru: “————”

In all honesty, his reunion with Emilia and Beatrice alone had been quite something, but the moment he saw and reunited with everyone present altogether in this place, Subaru’s heart received a fierce jolt.

Julius, whom he had left on the lower Floor along with Reid. Echidna, who had gotten both of her legs blown off and lost her life while apologizing for doubting Subaru. Shaula, who had not shown her form amidst all that mayhem and chaos. And finally, Ram, who had directed the utmost powerful suspicion towards Subaru, and did not meet him again thereafter.

Everyone, everyone was here. He had been granted an opportunity to exchange words with everyone once again.

And above all, the one whom Subaru had been the most conscious of in this place——

Meili: "——Nevertheleeess~, onii-san is truly such a troubled persooon~."

Subaru: "——Hk."

Meili: "Whaaat~'s with that reaction. Making a face like you've met a dead person, isn't it teeerribly~ rude?"

So recited the young girl, not too surprised by what Subaru had said.

With her dark-blue hair tied into a braid, the young killer wearing a stylish black outfit—— Meili.

Meili Portroute, was certainly there, moving and talking.

Subaru: "Meili…"

Meili: "——Oh? You remember my name, don't you~… In fact, I don't know what's different about onii-san compared to normal circumstances, so what did you forgeeet~?"

Subaru: "——Yeah, it's a bit complicated. Right now it may seem like I'm having no difficulty when conversing, but once you start digging deeper it becomes a mess. In other words, it's what they call episodic memory loss, I remember names of stuff quite well, but remembrances with people are all very uncertain."

Meili: "…Are you referring to, for example, what happened yesterdaaay~?"

Subaru: "——That's right."

Meili straitened her eyes, as her voice became faintly deeper. Subaru hesitated only for a second upon her question, but responded without falling to the pressure.

He perhaps could have talked his way out with a rough excuse, but he did not do that. He had decided to not do that—— Subaru would remain honest with them as long as possible.

Julius: "——Forgot about yesterday, huh. That's, that's, well."

Subaru: "————"

Hearing Subaru's response, as if having received a shock greater than simply his claims about "amnesia" in a certain sense, whispered Julius accompanied solely by Echidna, somewhat suspiciously.

However, putting their reactions aside,

Shaula: "Master, did you lose your memories again? How many times will you forget about me until you're satisfied. I'm Maicching[180]~."

Pushing in her voluptuous breasts, Shaula said so whilst making a sour expression.

Shaula's silly comments followed the same style as last time, but after coming this far, her comments left a strong impression of having an inexcusably odd ambience.

Subaru: "Delving deep into your nonsense also feels weird, but did this Master of yours really keep throwing memories around like this?"

Shaula: "——? Yeah, he kept throwing 'em around quite a lot. When he woke up in the morning and I greeted him, he said «Who're you, again? I don't remember you. I don't know you», and treated me like a woman the really old-fashioned way."

Subaru: "Hmm, if it's at that level, then it's difficult to determine if it was just a bad joke or what…"

Though only an assumption, but if Subaru got closer to Shaula and in ordinary life hereafter, that kind of a frivolous exchange seemed really possible.

However, Subaru was aware that there existed a self of his who had lost his memories and concealed that from Emilia and the others, and chose not to speak of him losing his memories. Deceiving that he had lost his memories under the cover of pretending it to be a bad joke would also be a move that existed.

Though by his own perspective, that would be deathly difficult. And since he had indeed died four times, this would not be a joke either.

[180] A reference to an eighties manga called "The Shame of Teacher Machiko", or also known as "Maicching Machiko-sensei".

“Anastasia”: “The aforementioned amnesia is understood. I would not say it is something that will not take any time to fully accept… but if there are things like traps which are capable of possibly triggering this phenomenon, then it seems it would be better to act while keeping that in consideration.”

Subaru: “The place with the highest possibility as the crime scene is the Library of Taygeta, where Emilia-chan found me collapsed. It seems like the place with the most history too.”

Emilia: “Chan…”

Subaru: “——?”

Echidna commenced the discussion with a serious expression, and Subaru nodded in agreement. However, in the midst of it, Emilia’s lonesome mumble left quite an impression.

Previously she had shown reactions with this expression in the middle of conversing with Subaru several times as well. In the end, the reason for it yet remained unclear.

Was he perhaps overlooking something fatal—— that was, frightening.

Subaru: “——Anyway, everyone, sorry for surprising you all. I think it’s pointless to tell you all to suddenly accept it and continue at the same pace. Let’s take a break for now. In that time, I’ll go draw water with Ram or something.”

Putting forward that suggestion, Subaru stood up. Ram raised her eyebrows upon what he said, whilst Emilia and Beatrice looked at Subaru anxiously.

However, nodding to the two’s look, Subaru turned his black eyes towards Ram,

Subaru: “Let’s go, Ram—— You were just making a face as if calling me to fetch water with you.”

Ram: “——Disgusting.”

Averting her gaze, Ram whispered in response to Subaru’s invitation.

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Ram: “So, what was the meaning of that farce earlier? Now that you’ve taken Ram out like this, you intend to talk about it now, right?”

With a bucket in her hand, Ram and Subaru headed to the water, away from the place of assembly. And once judging that they had taken sufficient distance from Emilia and the others, Ram fired her question.

Her not accepting Subaru’s claims regarding “amnesia” whatsoever was something which had happened each round. She was not being simply stubborn or being skeptical of the evidence, but she had a further important reason behind it.

——The existence of Rem. Ram’s beloved younger sister, who remained asleep.

In concern for her, Ram was unable to accept Subaru’s “amnesia”.

That was why she persistently denied Subaru’s “amnesia”. He did not know any particulars. But surely, Subaru had some sort of a connection with Rem when she was awake.

And that had been an immense support for Ram, for her existence as the elder sister. That is why——

Ram: “Kindly stop entrusting too many important roles on Emilia-sama or Beatrice-sama. Beatrice-sama aside, it would be far too heavy a burden for Emilia-sama. That is why it would be appreciated if you involve Ram now. The details are…”

Subaru: “——Ram, it’s true that I’ve lost my memories. Neither is it a lie, nor a plan.”

Ram tried to be relied upon, clinging onto that fine thread, however, Subaru must deny her.

Ram: “————”

Ram’s words were interrupted by Subaru’s straightforward remark, and she narrowed her eyes. Levitating within her light-crimson eyes was confusion, fear—— and rage.

Rage which could scorch and burn Subaru’s soul. And the reason for its existence, were her suspicions for Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “I’ve lost my memories. I have a grasp on the names and relationships of everyone within the Tower, but I can’t remember a single thing aside from that. That’s also true.”

Ram: “Kindly stop.”

Subaru: “I did talk to Emilia and Beatrice earlier, but I conveyed them the same thing. I have nothing else to convey. Right now, my hands are all empty.”

Ram: “Kindly stop, Barusu. If you say anything more than that…”

Subaru: “I know that we came to this Tower, to regain a lot of things which were robbed away from us. That we’re in the midst of the Examination too. That’s all. My intention, is…”

Ram: “Barusu, if you say anything more than this.”

Subaru: “——About Rem too, I have.”

Ram: “Barusu——!!”

Subaru heartbreakingly conveyed to Ram, that he had forgotten.

Denoting that she denied it, that she did not want to listen to Subaru’s words with her attitude, and upon hearing Subaru’s apology, Ram grabbed Subaru as an expression of her rage.

Subaru: “Guh!”

With his collars grasped, his back was thrown onto the wall. With unbelievable physical strength stemming from her build, Ram pinned Subaru and glared at him from a close distance.

He understood that the fire within her light-crimson eyes was trying to scorch Subaru and Ram herself.

The instant this fire scorched Subaru—— No, scorched Ram, the tragedy would be repeated.

Ram: “What’s your intention? Saying such a… such a stupid lie!”

Subaru: “It’s not, a lie… For me, lying to you is…”

Ram: “So you’re saying you’ve not lied? Then what should be done according to you? That Ram, should trust you? That Barusu, forgot Rem… something, so ridiculous!”

Subaru: “Ram…”

Further sharpening her eyes, Ram scowled at Subaru from a distance so close their lips could touch each other. Finally, Subaru noticed that that fire was not so much made up of rage as much as it was made of tears.

Her conflict went far deeper than what Subaru could ever imagine.

Subaru finally managed to grasp that, after having repeated four times. How prudent did one have to be, for them to want to possibly understand the emotions, the wounds others harbored in their chest?

Subaru came to realize this after repeating the same foul play four times, while Emilia and the others had realized that at once, which seemed dazzling to him.

Unable to merely be scorched by that dazzle, Subaru——

Subaru: "——I will, get Rem back for sure."

Ram: "——Hk!"

Glaring back into the light-crimson eyes, Subaru poured strength into his throat and conveyed that clearly.

Upon hearing it, Ram's eyes widened once again in surprise, but soon rage concealed that.

Ram: "How can you talk… about getting her back or whatever, Barusu, if you forgot about Rem!"

Subaru: "But still, I'll get her back. Rem, my memories, the goal behind coming to this Tower, accomplishing and regaining everything without leaving a single thing, we'll all go back together—— it's a matter of course that I'd guarantee at least that."

Ram: "——Barusu?"

Subaru: "It is, a matter of course… when you think of everything which happened in this Tower."

He was finding it difficult to breathe. Yet, Subaru distorted his cheeks for a different reason. Ram raised her eyebrows upon Subaru's reaction, and slightly relaxed the hands which were grabbing his collars.

Now, Subaru grabbed hold of her hands with his own, and pulled them apart. At the same pace, their bodies switched positions.

Ram: “——Disgusting. Kindly let go.”

Having gotten pinned to the wall now after their positions switched, Ram declared before Subaru while she shared glares with him.

However, though powerless, Subaru did not flinch away from saying the words he intended to speak.

Subaru: “Ram. I’m going to definitely get back both my memories, and Rem. For that, please lend me your strength.”

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “I need everyone’s strength. The «Natsuki Subaru» who was there until yesterday, whom you all knew, may not have said something so pathetic. But, for my present self…”

Julius had entrusted him, Beatrice had believed him, Echidna had forgiven him, Emilia had desired him.

And perhaps “Natsuki Subaru”, whom everyone held expectations for, may have changed this stalemated situation by himself.

However, the present Natsuki Subaru was not capable of that. And the people within this Tower, were far too loving for him to throw a tantrum and give up, saying that he was unable to do anything.

Subaru: “I know you won’t believe or forgive me for forgetting Rem. But, please keep that rage of yours for later. In exchange for that, I promise you.”

Ram: “Promise…?”

Subaru: “I will carry through, no matter what. I’ll eat it all up, no matter how many tries it takes. If I break this promise, if I give up in front of you, then feel free to do whatever you’d like to me, burn me, scorch me, anything.”

Ram: “————”

Ram's eyes widened, and the flame of rage within them weakened. What appeared instead of rage now, was an emotion which she had kept concealed until this moment.

As he witnessed that, Subaru pulled back his head and continued his straightforward approach with her—— continued his words from the same distance as when their glances had entangled, back when he had been trapped in the cage of ice.

Subaru: "That is my resolve."

Ram: "…Why would you go that far? If Barusu has truly forgotten, then you shouldn't think of getting Rem back this much."

Subaru: "————"

Ram: "Once you forget, it all turns into a void. It becomes a gaping vacuum, and the feelings for what used to be there all disappear. All vanish. Love, hatred, warmth, loneliness, everything."

Ram's quiet tone was feigned over by her cold attitude.

Those terribly experienced words, perhaps spoke of the void she had experienced herself. That was why, she found Subaru's resolve to be difficult to trust.

She believed that it was impossible to possess such a strong desire when embraced by that void.

Subaru: "The truth is, you're right. My memories are blank, and the feelings which my self, who was there until yesterday, felt for Rem have all slipped out of my hand, but…"

Ram: "Then, why?"

Subaru: "But, I know that you cherish Rem and desperately want to get her back."

He had seen Ram's form struggling, desperately wishing for regaining her beloved younger sister, Rem.

By witnessing a wish and love so strong with his own eyes, Subaru had been overwhelmed. And the desperate Ram was one of the people Subaru wished to be saved as well——

Subaru: "Right now, the reason I want to get Rem back is for «Natsuki Subaru», and you."

Ram: “————”

Subaru: “That’s why, I’m counting on you for when I give up. Do whatever you’d like to with my head, that is my atonement, that of the me who made you cry.”

Ram: “Ram never cried, don’t fool around.”

Subaru: “That hurts!?”

Receiving a tight slap to the side of his face, Subaru crumbled on that very spot.

Touching the cheek which had gotten flushed with his own hand, Subaru looked at Ram as if he was looking at something unbelievable.

Subaru: “Y-you… I was, just now, saying something, pretty brave…”

Ram: “Getting all energetic on your own accord, what do you mean by saying something brave? First things first, Barusu making a promise is laughable itself. Quite impressive how you yourself proposed what is the last thing that can be trusted in this world.”

Subaru: “I said the same to Emilia-chan, but how many promises did the me until yesterday break!?”

Ram: “Was there even a single promise that was kept?”

Subaru: “That bad of a level!?”

Vilified by the voice which had gotten colder, Subaru re-evaluated “Natsuki Subaru”. All other things good or bad aside, it seemed breaking promises was a common occurrence.

First of all, the greatest obligation for keeping promises was to make efforts for the same.

Protecting promises even when not being watched by anyone was why humans often put themselves to a disadvantage on their own volition. If not, it served as a proof of one possessing a deficient spirit.

Subaru: “I guess, someone like «Natsuki Subaru» wasn’t a half-decent guy after all…”

Ram: “Yes, that would be right. It seemed like you misunderstood, but the Barusu until yesterday was not a capable man who could manage everything by himself either. Rather, he was a simpleton and his

specialty was that, whenever he tried to manage something by himself, he would only enlarge the damage in the end. Ram also got caught up in a lot of the trouble."

Subaru: "Are you serious. Why did you bring a guy like that to the Tower…"

Ram: "He butted in. Along with that, he was a man of mere words and lip service. Skillful in his own way, and looked forward to chores being entrusted upon him. Also, he was also good at dandling Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama, wasn't it? Beyond that…"

Sitting cross-legged on the ground, Subaru felt far too uncomfortable.

He was being scolded about himself, even though it was not even about himself. Being told much about "Natsuki Subaru" by Emilia and the rest also felt agonizing in quite a complicated manner, and Ram firing words and speaking ill of "Natsuki Subaru" like this also felt, well, complicated.

Subaru became serious, determining to hear it to the end this time,

Subaru: "What else? Short legs, bad at remembering things, had an unhealthy diet, stubborn?"

Ram: "He had short legs, he was bad at remembering, he had an unhealthy diet, he was stubborn."

Subaru: "I suppose sooo~."

Ram: "——Along with that, he cherished Rem."

Subaru: "————"

Suddenly, her tone changed, and colorful emotions were painted into Ram's cold voice.

If the warmth of voice was to have a color—— it would be a tender soft crimson.

Her affection for her younger sister Rem in her voice, and reminded of "Natsuki Subaru" who used to be by her younger sister's side, she showed a glimpse of tender love, which would never disappear.

Such that Subaru hallucinated, that soft crimson was the color of kindness.

Ram: "Barusu—— Did you truly forget Rem?"

Subaru: "…Yeah."

Ram's eyes were reflecting Subaru, and she never averted them. Truly respectable.

In this kind of a scene, made to hear the words he did not want to hear, Subaru would probably avert his eyes. Yet she, Ram, did not try to avert her gaze even once.

Ram: "Barusu—— You will really remember Rem again, right?"

Subaru: "Yeah, I'll remember her again. And not just Rem, but everything else too."

Ram: "It will not be the worst even if you do not remember everything else. Kindly remember just Rem again."

Subaru: "Don't be absurd. Let me remember everything again…"

Ram: "Saying it once again. Kindly remember just Rem again, even if you need to die for it."

Subaru: "Yeah, I swear—— Even if I die, I'll remember everything again."

Remember everything again even if he had to die, quite literally.

What "Natsuki Subaru" had seen, heard, felt, established to come this far in this different world—— Natsuki Subaru would recover all of it.

Ram: "…Alright. You're free to go this time."

Upon hearing his response, the intimidating air surrounding Ram suddenly disappeared.

Sensing that, Subaru asked "Are you sure?", while remaining on the floor.

Subaru: "I know I requested this, but are you really fine with just this?"

Ram: "You are a man, aren't you? Accept it head-on. Barusu's resolve has been heard. And on top of that, you even said that anything could be done to you, burn you, scorch you, whittle you, gouge you in case you give up. If you found it difficult to hear that, then Ram's motherly affectionate heart will suspect you."

Subaru: “I don’t remember anything about whittling and gouging though…”

Ram: “Did you say something?”

Subaru: “I did not.”

Shaking his head, Subaru responded to Ram politely.

It would perhaps be amusing that once he were not able to rely on any god, then perhaps he should resign himself to this motherly affection for casting judgement upon him.

Ram: “Stand up, Barusu. Ram will not allow you to give up or kneel down.”

Subaru: “Don’t group sitting on the floor together with them… here.”

Standing up, Subaru brushed off his behind and faced Ram.

Ram, with her back resting on the wall and arms folded after adjusting her disheveled clothes, had already gone back to her normal state—— and Ram glared at Subaru, suggesting to him that this was her “normal state”.

Ram: “…Did you tell Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama the same thing?”

Subaru: “Those two… seemed like they didn’t even consider me giving up as a possibility, that’s why.”

Ram: “That’s so—— The fault is them being infected with Barusu.”

Subaru: “That’s why, I won’t request those two. Nor Julius or Echidna, emotionally, you see.”

Also perhaps, when it came to Emilia and Beatrice, Julius and Echidna.

He believed he had heard the thoughts of those four during the events that happened last time.

That was why, he would confirm the remaining answer ahead of it, now.

Subaru: “But, you know… Going by what you said, it seems the me until yesterday wasn’t too impressive of a guy either.”

Ram: “For Ram, your worth changes immensely depending on whether you have the memories of Rem or not. Watch what you ask.”

With a cold declaration, Ram turned her back towards Subaru and started walking.

The two were not really supposed to have the time to stop their feet whilst fetching water, but they did not want to worry Emilia and the others unnecessarily if they returned empty-handed.

Subaru held the bucket in his hand, whilst Ram stood beside him. And,

Subaru: “I was… «Natsuki Subaru» was here for certain, right?”

With a faint voice, Subaru directed his question towards Ram’s side profile.

This was more of an anxious cry than seeking confirmation. Naught more than words unsuitable immediately after pledging to not give up.

He knew it would not be strange for Ram to reprimand him, as he stood with his tongue dry.

Ram: “——Truly a fool.”

However, without doing anything of such sort and without halting her feet, Ram disparaged Subaru in seeming affection,

Ram: “Right now, it has just momentarily become invisible. It just feels like it is lost due to being under the depth of a variety of things which had been accumulated. Like flowers buried under the cold snow, once the season of snowmelt arrives they shall be visible once again—— Surely, that is all there is to it.”

Yes, Subaru could not show his current expression to Ram, who was hiding her own.

Immediately after acting so boldly, he could never show her an expression this pathetic.

Henceforth, Ram’s way, as she remained quiet without even attempting to look at him, at this moment, truly seemed like a mother’s affection to Subaru.

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The situation had largely changed—— or so he wanted to think, but the changes were not so great.

This was not the first time Subaru had opened his heart out after losing his memories, and the impact everyone felt was also a spectacle he had witnessed.

But should he change his heart's stance, everyone's point of view would also respectively change.

Last time, Subaru had much distrusted Emilia and the others, and that had been due to several factors such as their actions, attitudes and words. Firmly believing that they had all been plotting something.

However, upon doing away with those misgivings, he realized that their actions, attitudes and words had all been in concern for him, and he rebuked himself.

In other words, they restrained themselves to make sure Subaru was not made to feel anxious.

Suspecting their actions was a problem entirely on Subaru's part.

Subaru: "Let's do it, properly. Do it properly, Natsuki Subaru…"

Telling himself so, Subaru glanced at his palm.

The cause of the disappearance of Subaru's memories was highly likely to be in Taygeta. Though completing the Examination was also important, investigating the cause behind this amnesia was also urgent business.

There was no guarantee that it would not eventually develop into a ridiculous situation where everyone forgot each other and greeted each other saying "Hello, who might you be" upon seeing each other.

And the truth was, he very much had the flexibility to proceed with it all slowly.

Subaru: "Last time, and the time before that too, everything in the Tower was a total mess."

Last to last time, Subaru had successively discovered the cadavers of Emilia and the others—— No, of everyone except Emilia and Beatrice.

Last time was different, he got to witness the deaths of his comrades with his own eyes, and his heart fell into desolation and ruin.

However, all those abnormalities were disasters which should occur within the Tower not so far into the future.

As one who was aware of the damage these disasters would bring, Subaru must try to stop them from happening.

For that purpose, he shall dedicate all the strength he possessed—— That was why, first and foremost, Subaru would.

Subaru: "————"

A faint breath was present behind Subaru, who was standing at the edge of a great height.

A moderate level of attempt to conceal existence; sensing it was possible if one was conscious of it. Perceiving the foul play thanks to the knowledge he possessed beforehand, he turned his body around just on the verge.

???: "——Hk."

Subaru: "Whoops, that was dangerous—— Don't fall down instead of me."

Striking the two hands stretched out, his opponent's body pitched forward, Subaru instantaneously grasped the stretched-out hand to make sure nobody fell.

That body was light. Not lightness in the many ominous senses it could mean, but lightness befitting the appearance of the young girl—— yes, calling her a young girl would be adequate.

Subaru: "Alright, let's talk—— I'll have you take responsibility for killing me."

Saying so, Subaru smiled at the young girl whose elbow he had grasped—— Meili, commencing the climax of this mystery of catching the criminal who had pushed him off twice in the past.

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Setowi (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 56 – Talking About What Awaits

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 2 “In the Future”, Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

Meili: “————”

Possessing the hazardous intent to make him lose balance and fall down the spiral staircase, the girl—— Meili, looked on in surprise.

Closing his dark eyes, Subaru could not help but grumble upon this situation, a turn of events he had predicted but doubted halfway through.

He was glad that, by using Return by Death, he was able to eventually prevent this tragedy from happening. This likewise was proof that this young girl had been the one to push Subaru’s back twice in the past, in different timelines.

To think that the criminal who had pushed Subaru from a height and into his doom—— and that who had been killed by the very hands of “Natsuki Subaru” previously, was Meili Portroute.

Meili: “…Responsibility for killing me, huh, there you go again saying straaange~ things, onii-san.”

At that moment, while shimmers of confusion flashed by her widened eyes, Meili immediately loosened her lips, and donning a saccharine smile, her finger traced the arm, which belonged to Subaru, that was surrounding her own torso.

She took a step backwards whilst facing Subaru, who was standing at a distance from the spiral staircase.

Meili: “Perhaps your mind lost a lot of other stuuuff~ along with memories. This misunderstanding can happen only then.”

Subaru: “Misunderstanding?”

Meili: “Yes, don’t you think sooo~? ——Me trying to kill onii-san, would be a teeerrible~ misunderstanding.”

Putting her hands behind her back, Meili said so with a benign smile. Witnessing her truly dignified approach, this was something beyond even Subaru’s expectations.

He believed that he would never be able to avoid this mishap. But should the one he was struggling against be “*me*”—— no, Meili, then he might just manage to convince her.

She acted adamantly at best, but opportunistically at worst.

Choosing the most seemingly optimal solution momentarily was her way of living.

Frankly, that was precisely a beast’s way of living.

Meili: “There’s no need to be suspicious. Had I really wanted to kill onii-san, wouldn’t the Sand Dunes have been better for that, rather than this Tower? Ah, onii-san doesn’t remember all that, so you may not knooow~.”

Subaru: “I guess so. It’s weird. If you intended to kill from the very beginning, then you must have gotten countless chances to do so. But, you didn’t do so.”

Meili: “Don’t you agreeee~? Then…”

Subaru: “But, the matter of your motivation to kill me sprouting and growing since this morning’s a totally separate issue. Am I correct to say that this is a chain reaction due to what happened last night?”

Meili: “————”

Meili’s facial expression changed upon what Subaru mentioned. She sealed her lips, erased her smile, and then took a deep sigh.

And, shrugged her shoulders with an unfavorable attitude, unfitting of her appearance.

Meili: “Could it be, I have been trapped into this awkward situation, I suppooose~?”

Subaru: “What do you mean by «awkward situation»?”

Meili: “Isn’t that what you trieeed~? Lying about your memory loss, to see whether I would push off onii-san… To eliminate any obstacles that you may have on your side. To see how useful I was in this Tower…? This would be the perfect time and chance, to do so.”

The girl, who tried to reaffirm the authenticity of the situation, was displeased by her disadvantageous position.

Certainly, up to this point she had displayed no malice whatsoever on her part, but it was also true that Subaru knew how Meili would act beforehand. Even if she denied it, the evidence against Meili would not be altered.

However, there were some things that could be said clearly. Those being——

Meili: “Well, what exactly should I dooo~? Since everything has already come this far, should I try resisting and running away from here? Especially when those bad animal-chans aren’t here, even I can get away from onii-san by myseeelf~.”

Subaru: “Don’t get me wrong, Meili. My memory loss isn’t a lie for deceiving you. It’s the truth, that’s why I’m being serious, like I should be.”

Meili: “That’s that, I actually did doubt whether you were lying or not buuut~… In the end, what is it that onii-san wants to do? Do you think I believe it just because I’m not retaliating in respoooonse~?”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

The young girl put her hands on her slender neck, saying so whilst showing her tongue.

At that moment, Subaru’s heart rate accelerated. However, ironically enough, it was a metaphor for simply killing, not something as ridiculous as Meili remembering her own death.

With that conviction, the young female assassin gestured her capability to deal serious damage to Subaru’s heart. That was why Subaru did not intend to let her act on that conviction, but——

Meili: “Actually, I really don’t recommend using ways of killing that take a looong~ time. I do have methods that don’t require much suffering, but onii-san’s pretty bad at hiding stuff…”

Subaru: “——I, don’t intend to kill or hurt you. Even after this, from tomorrow onwards as well, whatever awaits, I intend to treat you the same way as I have done till now.”

Meili: “…Huh?”

Meili once again changed her expression, hearing Subaru’s response.

However, this was unlike the change that had come upon her when she had opted for the optimal solution for the immediate situation. Meili’s expression was filled with obvious dismay, as she looked at Subaru with eyes that could not comprehend what he was saying.

Upon that gaze, Subaru nodded.

Subaru: “Fortunately, your crime was prevented beforehand, and so, if we were to keep it a secret, everything’ll be fine. Even if you just think of killing me through some different method, all I’ll have to do is to prevent that as well. Although, all this undeniably leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Really bad.”

Meili: “Ah… W-what are you…”

Subaru: “But at least, did you get it this time? Doing something to me is an incredibly huge risk for you. If you’re going to say «but, still», and continue, then, you know, at the very least let’s just talk properly. If you’re still dissatisfied, I’ll hear as much as I…”

Meili: “Dissatisfied? Dissatisfied, you say…”

Abruptly, Meili murmured with a quiet and shivering voice. Afterwards, she sharpened her lips,

Meili: “What’s dissatisfying is this situation! I can’t believe it!”

Subaru was saying all this to persuade her into making a moderate decision. Following up with that, Meili shouted, with her eyes looking at him as if she were looking at something unbelievable.

Meili: “Can’t believe it, can’t believe it, I can’t believe iiit…”

While she pronounced so, her hands busily toyed with her braid.

It was visibly evident to Subaru that she had gotten perplexed regarding her own mental self-defense and that this was a sign—— a sign of dependence on someone who had the same hairstyle.

Meili: “Onii-san has no idea about what I tried to do right nooow! If that’s wrong then, it’s straaange~. If that’s wrong, then…”

With words filled with frustration, Meili’s attitude was unnaturally desperate.

This was Subaru’s first time seeing Meili so disturbed—— no, rather he had first seen her like this in her Book of The Dead.

After what she had done last night, encountering Subaru in Taygeta, and after having a conversation with “Natsuki Subaru”, she had decided to kill the amnesiac Natsuki Subaru.

However, this plan of murder, carried out in such a hurry, would have had been a double-edged sword for her too.

Although Subaru would have been pushed off to death, ignorant, how did she plan to escape the allegations of murder that could be placed upon her after Subaru’s death?

Of course, there was a good chance that his death could be dismissed as an accident—— or perhaps not.

Should it be Emilia, Beatrice, Ram or any of the others; by now, Subaru knew that they would not let his “Death” slide by without even trying to uncover the truth behind it.

In that case, it was inevitable that Meili’s crime would eventually come to light.

Ram, Julius, or Echidna were much smarter than Subaru, and they would be able to see through to the truth behind his death at once. It was unimaginable to think that Meili had never taken that into her consideration.

That was why, this——

Subaru: “This is, just a desperate urge of yours. You just have a habit of murder. You don’t even consider other factors for solving issues. That isn’t your fault.”

Meili: “——Hk! Don’t talk like you understand! What does onii-san… you! What do you know about me!?”

Subaru: "——I do know."

Meili: "————"

Meili, grinding her teeth, stiffened herself as if she had been doused in cold water.

Looking straight at Meili, Subaru assertively declared,

Subaru: "Meili. I know about you. I know it may sound pretty creepy but, I may even know more about you than the only other two people in this world that know about you, you know?"

Upon Subaru's shrug, Meili's worry intensified.

Believing that it was completely obvious; however, at the same time, Subaru was looking for a way to convey that undeniable truth—— he was struggling with that twisted "self-love" in the back of his chest.

He would remember, "*my*" never-ending temptation.

A whispering voice seemed to echo right before Natsuki Subaru took any action, repeatedly tempting Subaru to solve his problems through murder, the worst course of action packed with cowardice.

By reading her Book of the Dead, the ghost of the dead Meili Portroute and its temptations, had returned to haunt Natsuki Subaru——

Subaru: "——No, that's not it."

Shaking his head, Subaru then pondered over what the girl he had killed had done.

During all this time, something had happened. Visibly evident from the confusion and frustration of the girl standing before him. Above all, recalling what Subaru had seen about Meili in her Book of The Dead.

Considering what Meili had suffered through, it could never be said that her personality had simply become murderous.

This was not the same Meili as the one in her Book of The Dead.

That was something Subaru's soft heart was somewhat sure about.

After all, upon that evidence, the girl with that voice did not show herself to Subaru.

Subaru: "————"

Putting it terribly straightforwardly, Subaru had lived through Meili's life by the Book of the Dead. He had seen her days since he had become conscious—— the establishing of her ego, the establishing of her way of action; however, she had never thought of ending someone's life with such lack of fairness and reason.

In those days, there was an unquestionable emptiness in Meili's heart, and her experiences increased the "fear" inside her, but there remained a lone something that glimmered within herself. Its name being——

Subaru: "——Elsa Granhiert."

Meili: "——Hk."

Subaru: "That is the reason why you tried to kill me, yes?"

Upon that question, Meili's facial expression distorted with bitterness.

That was the rage of getting something sensitive that should never be touched, be prodded—— No, be trampled upon by one's feet.

However, Subaru yet dared to do so. Because,

Subaru: "Removing your shoes when entering someone's house, but walking in rudely while wearing shoes when entering others' hearts, is the rule of the Natsuki household."

As one of its members, Subaru climbed into the heart of the young assassin.

Deep in her heart, there was something that drove her into acts of impulsive violence——

A murderer of black, whom Subaru did not know, but was familiar with.

Just thinking about her gave rise to feelings in the heart, like a desire of relief, longing, sadness and rage, and emptiness—— the feelings that Meili felt for her were extremely complicated, yet, extremely simple.

——Meili, longed for Elsa, loved her, and admired her.

That was why, having her be stolen away gave rise to despair, suffering, hatred, wrath, murderous intent and despondency.

The entire time she had accompanied Subaru and the others in their journey, it had all been for the sake of revenge—— could not be said for her unskilled self.

In fact, it could be said that Meili was very clumsy.

A despairing young girl who was ignorant about her own emotions, enough to not know about the depth of the scar in her heart.

——A professional assassin who made up her own environment, that was who Meili Portroute was.

Subaru: “Did you want to take revenge?”

Meili: “… I don’t know.”

Subaru: “Even so, Elsa was…”

Meili: “I don’t have such a wish. I’m well-aware of that…”

Meili shook her head twice in response to Subaru’s question.

Subaru understood Meili’s feelings. And, Meili was also well-aware of where Subaru’s words were coming from.

In this situation, Subaru and Meili were in equal footing.

Therefore, filled with sadness and stuck in a dark chamber, ignorant of the correct answer, all she could do in order to express her emotions was to act like the assassin she was, and “murder”.

At the same time, the hatred that Meili held while remaining trapped in that world, left solely that option for her.

Despite all this, Meili’s desperation for Elsa did not reach its end.

For Meili, Elsa may have been a shining light, but that light was far too dazzling for ordinary people to follow.

Subaru: “I know, that you are holding back your feelings. But, the answer you’re looking for probably can’t be found this way. So.”

Meili: “————”

Subaru: “Leave this place to me. I won’t make things worse. At the very least I’ll work hard to make sure things don’t get worse. If you’d believe that.”

Meili: “…I can’t, trust that. Anything which, may come out of onii-san’s mouth.”

No matter how forcefully Subaru persuaded her, Meili, who was hiding her face, did not nod even slightly.

That was obvious. Because that meant finding a way of action that did not exist in her way of life.

On the other hand, there was Natsuki Subaru, who would propose and preach whatever he wanted to without flinching even the slightest.

On top of that, if a senior ever invited him to a place with full preparation and bashed him, even Subaru would be surprised by how much it would sting.

Henceforth, since he supposed that she would say this, he had well prepared other measures.

Subaru: “So what comes out of my mouth can’t be trusted, I’ll reflect on that. Thanks, until yesterday I was already pretty bad with promises. So.”

Meili: “That’s why?”

Subaru: “Instead of a promise between you and me, let’s make a promise between you and us.”

Meili: “————”

Upon Subaru’s words Meili frowned, unaware of his intentions.

However, the answer to her doubts was brought to light soon afterward. That being——

???: “——Mhm, it’s fine. I was also carefully listening, as a witness of the promise.”

Meili: “——Hk.”

Hearing that voice, Meili’s shoulders shivered, but she managed to compose herself. What appeared in before her next was an outstanding beauty, whose magnificence could not be doubted——

Upon her appearance, Meili’s eyes widened, and her lips trembled.

Meili: “Onee-san… You heard everything?”

???: “Subaru told me to stay here and see… to stop Meili were she to do something dangerous, that’s what he said.”

Saying so, stepping into the place where both of them stood, with fluttering hair that was reminiscent of the glitter of moonlight and standing as a figure of a seemingly mythical beauty, was Emilia.

Hearing Emilia’s words, Meili rotated her neck in astonishment.

Meili: “If I was in danger…? Not, onii-san…?”

Emilia: “Yeah, if Meili was in danger. Well, is it okay now, Subaru?”

Subaru: “——Yeah, that’s right. It’s just that it made me a bit anxious.”

Emilia: “——? Why are you turning your face away? Did something happen, Subaru?”

Subaru: “No, it’s just that, you’re just, too cute to look at directly…”

Subaru responded with a whisper to Emilia’s question, who had tilted her neck. As Emilia further tilted her neck, Subaru managed to put aside the trembling of his throat and his embarrassment, and turned his attention to the perplexed Meili once again.

As Subaru had foreseen the attack, he was confident about stopping Meili’s crime. The problem after that was the occurrence of “Natsuki Subaru”.

Speaking of his purpose, it may be possible that in the loop in which "Natsuki Subaru" had killed Meili, it was possible that it had been simply self-defense against Meili's attempt to murder, and, immediately after stopping her, "Natsuki Subaru" did not necessarily take actions against Subaru's will.

Therefore, Subaru determined that he would leave this problem to people stronger than him.

He had complete faith that even if his consciousness disappeared and "Natsuki Subaru" appeared, Emilia would certainly—— no, his comrades would certainly do something about it.

Emilia: "Listen, Meili. I believe in what Subaru has said. If Meili can't believe it, then it's fine to just observe him carefully. And, if he breaks the promise, I'll be angry alongside you."

Meili: "Observe, onii-san…? That's weird. Isn't that strange? Observing onii-san and onee-san, is what I…"

Emilia: "If Meili wants to do something bad, that can be only after Subaru actually breaks the promise. Until then, observe whether he breaks it or not. Isn't that fair?"

Meili: "————"

Meili was confused by Emilia's words, who bent enough to have their eyes at the same level.

Inside her mind, her ways of coping with and solving truths and circumstances distorted and crumbled.

Subaru: "You seemed to be about to make a huge mistake, but mine and Emilia-chan's *yoi sebu*[181] somehow prevented that. Therefore, this is your chance to learn how it should have actually been done. This is your chance to find a different solution than killing me… it's a bet."

Meili: "Bet…?"

Subaru: "Settle down the evil feelings inside you, and see whether you still want to kill me, or whether you've changed your mind… I'll also, do my best at giving you lectures about morality."

Scratching his head, Subaru laid down this path for Meili's confusion.

[181] Engrish flip. Means "nice save" (よいセーブ), originally "ナイスセーブ" (nice save).

Frankly, unneeded care was unneeded and intrusive. There was a certain way of living that Meili had followed until now, and Subaru was trying to arbitrarily open new options for her.

But should she refuse it, her path would meet a dead end because of the sand Tower. If her way of life were followed, they could not possibly ever conquer this sand Tower together. And——

Subaru: "I'm not letting you get off this train. I don't know how old you are or anything but… When I was around your age, I got the adults around me to help me all the time."

Meili: "————"

Subaru: "So I will help you even if you don't want me to. You're far too young to think stuff like what you should be doing or refusing adults' help."

Saying so, Subaru stepped forward to reduce the distance between him and Meili.

Seeing the distance between them shrink, Meili's shoulders shivered. Subsequently, Subaru patted the head of the nervous Meili, who looked up with uneasiness in her eyes.

He would not crush that thin neck. He presented this decisively different alternative, to "Natsuki Subaru".

Meili was a child, that did not need to die. And——

Emilia: "I sincerely request you to please trust Subaru… Trust us, Meili."

Meili: "——Ah."

While Subaru caressed her head, Emilia hugged her from behind, leaving her completely immobile. Embracing her body, Emilia rubbed her cheek against her as Meili lightly bit her lips,

Emilia: "This sand Tower is a place too small for you to decide something big."

Meili: "————"

Emilia: "Leave this place, go to a bigger place and find your answer there. We will also work reaaally hard."

Teaching her all this when she possessed feelings, while trapped in such a cage, was not exactly the best thing to do.

Even so, this was the only way Subaru could have said it. With complete, utmost care and kind words, they conveyed it to Meili.

Meili: "————"

In response, Meili repeatedly and thoughtfully glanced into their eyes and out, and then.

Meili: "I don't want to, forget about… Elsa."

Subaru: "Ah, that's fine. There is no need to forget someone you loved. It's just that, weeell…"

Cutting his own words off, Subaru thought of the beautiful woman of black he witnessed in the Book of the Dead.

What a strange impression. He had never been in contact with her, yet he still had a sense of familiarity towards her. Reminiscing such an opponent, Subaru subconsciously stroked his guts.

Subaru: "——Even if it's someone you love, I wish you don't imitate their way of doing things."

Yes, he believed so.

——Meili was powerless, had lost her path; but still, after several silent seconds had passed, she nodded.

Arc 6 Chapter 57 – Let's Disregard That for Now

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 2 "In the Future", Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

???: "Betty was dragged into this against her will, in fact. But since it was Subaru's request, it had to be properly answered to, I suppose."

???: "Master is an invulnerable man, after all. I wasn't worried or anything. In fact, I was suspecting the possibility of ankle-biter number two going off and exploding the moment she stood behind Master."

Meili: "Ah, uh…"

Upon looking at those faces slowly climbing up the spiral staircase, Meili had her white cheeks go red, and tried moving her lips as she stood at a loss for words.

Viewing the changes occurring in Meili from the side, Subaru then raised his hand and said "Hey" to the shadows on the staircase.

Subaru: "Thank you for being on the rear guard. I'm relieved that falling down could be avoided somehow."

???: "…No matter what Subaru may say, there's no saying she would've been forgiven if you really had come down falling, in fact. That's why this is a matter of being lucky, I suppose."

Snorting her nose, climbing up the staircase holding the hem of her dress, was Beatrice. Behind her was also Shaula's figure, her hand behind her head, laboriously returning to the Fourth Floor from far down below on the spiral staircase.

Meili: "W-w-wha… o-onii-san? Those two, what is the meaning of thiiis~…?"

Upon seeing Beatrice and Shaula's figures, Meili looked back at Subaru in astonishment.

Subaru crossed his arms upon the bewilderment of the young girl who had been unaware of this.

Subaru: "Well, I don't really know how to word it, but the plan just now was a lot like walking on a tightrope… I don't like to think this way, but the *okimari*[182] of having me be pushed by you and just dying had also been quite possible, you know? It turned out all nicely 'cause I happened to catch your arms stylishly beforehand."

Meili: "B-but, onee-san was also keeping a watch over us, no~…?"

Subaru: "Well, I also know about Emilia-chan being *kyouryoku*[183] despite her mad cute looks, so it was just in case of an emergency. Though it'd be no laughing matter if Emilia-chan also jumped down with me in an effort to save me."

The truth was, at the very end of the previous loop, Subaru had fallen alongside Emilia. He had embraced her, but had been unable to save her—— this had been etched into his heart profoundly.

If the same happened again, then Subaru would surely push Emilia to someplace safe; that was what he would like to say, but that his body would not be able to act properly in extreme conditions was something he could not avoid.

Subaru: "Why, I simply played this card just to make sure that emergency doesn't happen. I judged it'd be alright if two people… Beatrice and Shaula were watching from below."

He had witnessed that Beatrice was a skilled magician with his own eyes, and when it came to Shaula, albeit the specifics remained unknown, there was no need to confirm that she possessed strength unfitting of her appearance.

No doubt with regards to that, since Subaru had her lift him up just in case when he requested their cooperation and discussed this plan with them.

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[182] Engrish flip. Means "standard/routine/stereotype" (お決まり), originally "パターン" (pattern).

[183] Engrish flip. Means "powerful" (強力), originally "パワフル" (powerful).

Meili: "Why go so far, there must've been much simpler and wiser ways and yeeet~…"

Upon hearing Subaru's explanation, so whispered Meili with a downcast gaze. Her embarrassment for having been seen at a disgraceful spot was fading away, what she felt instead was perhaps the negativity of punishment.

Upon her words, Subaru said "Yeah", as he touched his cheek with a finger.

Subaru: "Just as you said, I think there were easier and wiser ways. I think so, but…"

Meili: "Think so, buuut~…?"

Subaru: "At the level my mind operates on, easiness and compromise are two sides of the same coin, and wisdom is partnered with unfairness. I… Hm, I did not want to resort to compromise and unfairness."

Meili: "————"

Upon hearing those words, Meili's eyes somewhat straitened, as she softly bit her lips.

Looking at her with a wry, strained smile, Subaru clenched his fists.

He thought of somehow fixing everything.

He wished to somehow fix everything.

Henceforth, in order to somehow fix everything, he wanted to do everything he was capable of.

Subaru: "That's why I didn't hesitate in asking Emilia and the rest for help."

Emilia: "Mhm, that's right. I was also very surprised when Subaru first told me about this."

So pronounced Emilia, still hugging Meili from behind. She had her chin rest on Meili's petite shoulder, and glanced up towards Subaru,

Emilia: "But I knew Subaru was very serious at a single glance. Besides…"

Subaru: "Besides?"

Emilia: "——I was happy that Subaru was willing to discuss with me. Because Subaru always makes preparations to put an end to everything by the time I even take notice."

Smiling with her eyes upturned, Subaru halted his breath before the young girl with amethyst eyes.

As Subaru stiffened his cheeks, Emilia instead loosened her cheeks and lips, following with a nod.

Emilia: "So I was happy that you came asking what to do and allowed us to think alongside this time. Hehe, it's a bit strange, isn't it?"

Subaru: "…No point in saying it, but the me from up until yesterday really pisses me off. No, but since getting to look at this face and hearing this voice is my special privilege, did something rather deserved happen to the me until yesterday…? What do you say, Emilia-chan?"

Emilia: "Sorry. I've got no idea what you're talking about."

Subaru, continuing to smile, blathered and loosened his shoulders.

And then, the two who were climbing the staircase below these three finally joined them.

Beatrice: "Once again, it's relieving to know that nothing happened, in fact."

Subaru: "Nothing happened, would be a bit of a faulty expression. Considering tons of reformations occurred within Meili's consciousness… so something did happen."

Shaula: "Ohh~, as expected of Master! Absolutely no idea what you're on about, but when it comes to your cool aura then there's nothing that can surpass it!"

Subaru: "Do you actually even hold any respect for me?"

Shaula seemed to be impressed by anything she was told regardless of what it was, but when Subaru consulted regarding the principle of saving Meili, the first one to endorse him had also been her.

Naturally, it also did feel like she had put no deep thought to it and simply wished to support Subaru with what he wanted to do, but it was also certain that he had been saved by such existence of hers.

Meili: "Um, Beatrice-chan… are you, not angry with me?"

Beatrice: "It's a matter of course that Betty is angry, I suppose. But you seem like you'd get popped to shreds by Betty, so Betty has somehow managed to shut it off, in fact. There's also what happened in the Sand Dunes, so what happened now shall be written off, I suppose."

Meili: "————"

Beatrice: "However! The only things that are going to be written off are the events of this trip, in fact. You still bear the sin of burning Betty's Forbidden Library from the previous mansion, I suppose. As long as that's the case, Betty will probably never forgive you, in fact."

Crossing her short arms, Beatrice responded to Meili's doubt with a stern look in her eyes. Meili halted her breath upon her words, but Emilia immediately laughed with a "Hehe",

Emilia: "It may be a bit difficult to grasp, but Beatrice just now said «probably». She's saying she'll properly forgive Meili if she stays a good girl. You're so kind."

Beatrice: "Emilia! Don't go saying unnecessary stuff, I suppose!"

Meili: "…I'll do whatever I can, to touch your heart."

Exposing the other side of the strict comments, Emilia laughed before the blushing Beatrice. Seeing them, Meili responded with a soft voice.

Witnessing the scene, Subaru nodded several times in satisfaction.

Could he not say that finally, before his eyes, progress had actually happened?

At the very least, her actions, having ultimately believed that Subaru must be killed, had been prevented. Though this was yet merely one of the tragedies which would occur in this Tower——

Shaula: "——So, is this really fine, Master?"

Subaru: "Hm?"

Said Shaula with an innocent and calm voice, standing behind Subaru, who was sunken in thoughts. Standing beside Subaru, narrowing her dark eyes, she was glaring at the spectacle, that of Beatrice and Meili going back and forth with Emilia in between them.

And as Subaru furrowed his eyebrows, she resumed with the same tone,

Shaula: "The girl who tried to kill Master. Is it really okay to let her go with no reproach?"

Subaru: "You sure ask some dangerous stuff… It's fine. Meili's already been reproached. But, things ended up like this because nobody actually taught her about why she was being reproached. She will be taught about that, from now onwards."

Shaula: "Master says that, but what if she tries to kill Master again because of that?"

Subaru: "That'd happen if I'm extraordinarily bad at teaching, But, it's not like I'll be the only one at it."

That was how Subaru responded to Shaula's questioning.

If Subaru were to aim for changing the sense of ethics of someone fostered to be an assassin from a very young age by himself, then it would be extremely difficult, and in all honesty, he did not possess the strength to shoulder this responsibility either.

However, Subaru did not think of doing anything and everything by himself.

He had relied on Emilia and the others for stopping Meili's crime as well. He would have Emilia and Beatrice go along with him ahead of this as well.

Subaru: "Of course, I'll have you helping as well, Shaula. Because it'll be a long road of her objecting individual sense of values."

Shaula: "…Me, too?"

Subaru: "That's of course. You… Well, on the flip side you have teacher-like ambience, and I won't leave you out alone. Your body is overflowing with motherhood, use it nicely to break through to Meili's obstinate heart."

Before Shaula, who pointed a finger at herself in sheer surprise, Subaru declared relaxedly and shrugged his shoulders.

It was a mystery as to what she was so astonished by, but considering she often overreacts, Subaru did not question it much, thinking that just was a part of her.

Upon Subaru's judgement, Shaula sandwiched her face with her hands,

Shaula: "Me too, huh. Me too, together, with Master, me too… ahh~, ahhhh~. Ahhhhh~."

Subaru: "Huh… what happened, you…"

Shaula: "Nothing! I've decided! Just as Master ordered, I'll raise that ankle-biter number two into a proooper~ upright person!"

With a red face, Shaula sprinted towards Emilia and the rest. And lifting up Meili's body with ease, hugged her and pushed her into her voluptuous chest.

Meili: "Kyaa~!? What happeneeed~, naked onee-san. You surprised me!"

Shaula: "It's okay it's okay, you can act like a spoiled child under my care as much as you'd like, ankle-biter number two. My chest belongs to Master, but I'll share it with ankle-biter number two just for now. The wealthy should give to the needy, you see!"

Meili: "Hey, onii-san!? You drilled some weird stuff into naked onee-san's head once again, riiight~!?"

Meili, being treated by Shaula as per her own pleasure, raised her voice upon judging this was Subaru's antic.

Subaru: "Well, think of it like compensation for worrying everyone, and get treated affectionately all nicely. It's alright, from what I saw she doesn't have any ill will."

Meili: "…Geez, such hopeless people. It's fine, I'll let it pass. But, what happened here is a secret to other peoooople~."

Saying so, Meili puffed her cheeks as she was sandwiched by Shaula's breasts. But, upon Meili's comment, Subaru scratched his head and uttered an "Ah".

Meili furrowed her eyebrows upon his reaction, and in Subaru's stead, Emilia replied to her.

Emilia: "Um, Meili, it's pretty difficult to say this, but…"

Meili: "…I'm getting a bad feeling about thiiis."

Whether that bad feeling of Meili's had hit the mark or not.

The answer to that question could immediately be understood by her reaction to the words Emilia followed up with. That was——

Emilia: "——Subaru also properly consulted Ram and the others who are not here."

Meili made an immensely wry expression.

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The room which was used for meals or conversations was dubbed the Common-Use Room, but what awaited Subaru and the rest when they returned to the Common-Use Room was Ram, with her hands on her hips.

Ram: "Is that so. Seems you cleaned it all up. Not bad, worthy of a compliment."

Receiving Subaru and the rest upon their safe return, Ram said so to the five with peaceful eyes.

That was perhaps high praise from her, hence Subaru accepted it straightforwardly. The whole incident with Meili was something he could brag about to even her. And he was relieved that his boasting would not lead to him being in a bind.

???: "There is no requirement to say this, but she had been awaiting your return standing like this the whole time."

Ram: "…There truly was no necessity to say that. Kindly restraint yourself, Echidna."

"Anastasia": "You have had this attitude ever since you got to know I was the one controlling this body. How likeable."

Saying so and making Ram stiffen the edges of her eyebrows, was Echidna, with her sitting down on the floor of the Common-Use Room. She accepted Ram's eloquence with a smile, then looked at Subaru and the rest.

Meili: "Hmph."

"Anastasia": "So, what is she so sulky about?"

The one Echidna pointed to was Meili, who was being carried on Shaula's back.

Groaning with a bitter expression, without responding to Echidna's question, Meili continued to sulk and averted her eyes away. She was being completely peevish.

"Anastasia": "So, for example, she is irritated because her plan for murder has been intercepted. If it truly is as such, then I am slightly uneasy about leaving her without any constraints like this…"

Subaru: "Ah, no, no, that's wrong, that's wrong."

Echidna's insecure supposition, and the way she had visibly been on-guard for Subaru even in this short interval—— must be a display of her emotions, of wanting to protect the girl named Anastasia, the owner of her body.

She could not help but form a strange misunderstanding, and Subaru firmly denied it.

Subaru: "She just feels awkward that her thoughts were uncovered, and everyone got to know about them. It's so childlike, it's cute."

"Anastasia": "Considering what she attempted to do, it feels odd to describe it as something childlike but… I see. Even after losing memories, one's true nature does not change so easily, something such as that, hm. Must be surprising to you, Natsuki-kun."

Subaru: "It's my honor if it serves to be entertaining for you, that's all."

Winking towards Echidna's line of sight, he was then ridiculed by a "Haa" from Ram. Afterwards, Subaru turned around in a circle and surveyed the room from the inside.

Subaru: "Huh, Julius isn't here? Where is he? *Benjo*[184] or something…"

???: "——At the time of utmost serious affairs, you engage in trifling matters, the thought of that is truly vexing."

Subaru: "…It's not like it's decided that it's a trifling matter. It may be a rather important task being done, you know."

Hearing a voice from behind, Subaru curved his cheeks and turned towards the echoed voice. Receiving his smile, which had a negative connotation to it, was Julius, as he touched his own bangs.

As he returned from the outside of the Common-Use Room, Emilia tilted her head.

Emilia: "Julius, did you have a stomachache?"

Julius: "Emilia-sama, do not take his words and deeds at face value. Certainly, he is your one and only Knight, a position in which you should trust him more than anyone, unquestionably so, but sometimes, even his prominent words and deeds are…"

Subaru: "Hey, hey, don't stuff such unnecessary stuff into Emilia-chan's mind. First of all, you were the one who wasn't even in here. I'll excuse you if you say you were out in the *benjo* for a bit."

Julius: "——Heh."

Glared at by Subaru's black eyes, Julius loosened his lips.

A way of laughter seemingly losing breath, truly irksome and befitting of his appearance, but Subaru felt that there just was something wrong with that laughter.

"Anastasia": "Emilia, and Natsuki-kun, no need to worry. Following the earlier conversation, Julius went to be on the lookout for the outside. As Meili wields the power to control Witchbeasts, and in case she truly intended to achieve her goal, what should be seen as the greatest threat would be the existence of the Witchbeasts outside the Tower, you see."

[184] Engrish flip. Means "toilet" (便所), originally "トイレ" (abbreviation for "toilet").

Julius: "So I was on the watch for the outside of the Tower from the balcony I found last night. Fortunately, there appeared to be no oddities outside of the Tower, and it seems everything was alright inside as well…"

With that said, Julius turned his gaze towards Meili. Atop Shaula's back, upon noticing Julius's gaze, she made a sour look with her lips.

However, seeing Meili's conduct, Julius abruptly relaxed his cheeks.

Julius: "I am glad, it seems everything was resolved safely. Though when you spoke about having lost memories and then about this, it felt as if heaven and earth had partly been overturned…"

Subaru: "That's way too huge an exaggeration. Well, that's not something I, who lost memories, can say."

Julius: "I suppose so. Saying heaven and earth got overturned, would be going too far. Just slightly, though… Anyway, I am glad everyone is safe. After having sought even Emilia-sama's help, if it still ended up as a failure, then there would not even be any possibility to recover."

Subaru: "Yeah, I'm also relieved… You and I, are close enough to be quarrelling like this, right."

Julius: "——Heh."

Julius laughed in a stuck-up manner at what Subaru said, with a finger raised.

Thinking that this smile did not have that earlier faint vacillation, Subaru also felt satisfied.

Subaru: "————"

This made the fifth time of them meeting by chance, ever since he had lost his memories.

All this time, he did not get much time spent peacefully, and the reality was that he must have spent much more of his time with Emilia and the others. And surely, "Natsuki Subaru" had his own way of dealing with them.

Henceforth, Subaru wanted to follow "Natsuki Subaru's" footsteps carefully, to make sure there was not too huge a deviation, to make sure Emilia and the others would not be saddened.

He did not want to directly lay his eyes upon the reality that Emilia and the others had lost "Natsuki Subaru"—— Besides, it would surely be better to not face a reality of such sort.

If Natsuki Subaru disappeared, and "Natsuki Subaru" returned, then surely.

Subaru: "Alright then, let's aim at capturing the Tower with this newly-reborn all-friendly *dantai*[185] of ours. Any objections?"

Emilia: "Mhm, none. Let's give it our all."

Beatrice: "That name, friendly *dantai* has a bit of a sense of apathy to it, in fact."

Regardless, Emilia and Beatrice presented two extremes of agreement to Subaru's opinion. The others did not seem to hold any objections either, which relieved him for the moment.

Julius: "Will it be fine to accept that she will not be a problem this way?"

Subaru: "Yeah, that'll be fine. She won't act recklessly and try to kill me behind everyone's backs. However, whether she'll be able to keep this up hereafter depends on Meili, as she grows up watching our backs, so be careful to make sure she doesn't get to see our backs being uncool or dreadful."

Julius: "I see. So it is a matter of appearances. Then I want you to leave it to me."

Turning his gaze towards Meili, Julius drew his chin in and agreed with Subaru's words.

Appearances seemed somewhat of a wrong way to describe it, but to have others look at one's back—— in other words, becoming a role model; in that sense Julius's description was certainly befitting.

The present Subaru could not say he had been with him much, but he had still witnessed that Julius possessed a strong sense of self-denial and excellency in various kinds of conducts.

Those were the fruits of his own ready wit, an indication of the refinement of the environment he grew up in, and at the same time they also symbolized the hard work he had put into applying them to himself.

[185] Engrish flip. Means "team/party" (団体), originally "チーム" (team).

Through evident hard work, he had applied those to himself. Them being something valuable, something priceless.

Emilia: "——Subaru, are you okay? Do you think you'll be able to talk?"

Subaru: "Woah!?"

Suddenly, Emilia grasped Subaru's arm while he stood with halted breath, looking at him in concern. Seeing how close he was to her, Subaru regained his senses and jumped backwards, flustered.

Witnessing Subaru's overreaction, Emilia spilled out a faint "Ah…",

Emilia: "You know, ever since you've woken up… No, ever since you said you lost your memories, Subaru just keeps getting surprised by me, no? Is there something strange about me? Is there something on my face?"

Subaru: "No, um, not at all. There's just your cute eyes and cute nose and cute lips and cute ears."

Emilia: "Cute… Hehe, thank you. But if that's the case, then why?"

Subaru: "I guess it's because it feels like Emilia-chan's features aren't just the parts added up, but multiplied such that they complement each other. Also, your voice is cute. You're also cute. This won't do, what an angel."

Subaru covered his face with his hands and looked at Emilia through his fingers, suggesting she was too dazzling to look at. Hearing Subaru's comments, it was Beatrice who responded suddenly,

Beatrice: "——Hk! Try saying that in a more Subaru-like fashion, I suppose!?"

Subaru: "Huh!? Eh, what's wrong!?"

Beatrice: "Again, say the words «Emilia looks like an angel» in a Subaru-like fashion, in fact."

Subaru: "What kind of public shaming is that!? I'm not doing it! It's embarrassing! Beatrice, you're also cute like an angel! Don't sulk!"

Beatrice: "It's true that Betty is cute like an angel, but that's not what it's about, I suppose…"

Heartbroken, Beatrice lowered her shoulders in dejection. This made him feel guilty, as Subaru then patted her head, everyone now in formation of a circle in the Common-Use Room.

Now this made for a proper place to converse. It was regrettable that the real progress sought after had not been realized yet, but it was about time to continue the conversation rather boldly.

Subaru: "With all that being said, once again, Meili's a part of our team. As she's now entered it in earnest, I would like to hurry up and leave this sandy Tower as well, so a societal inspection of Meili may be had. Any objections?"

Ram: "That manner of speaking really makes one question if you have truly lost your memories or not… However, Barusu's memory loss is a rather light problem when compared to more serious ones, yet still is an issue."

Emilia: "Mhm, that's right. It's not like they could've just suddenly disappeared out of nowhere, so we have to make sure Subaru gets his memories back…"

Subaru: "Ah, about that, how about we disregard it for now?"

After raising a hand and seeking approval, Subaru interjected during a pause in Ram and Emilia's comments. Everyone in the conversation, not just the two of them, responded with a "Huh?" in surprise.

The only one not surprised was Shaula, but she was busy tending to Meili after earnestly accepting Subaru's request, so he left her out for the moment.

Beatrice: "Subaru… Please don't make Betty and the others worry too much, in fact. Your memory loss was sufficiently surprising, yet saying that it's alright to not recover them would be far too self-abandoning, I suppose."

Emilia: "Yeah, that's right, Subaru. Are you perhaps thinking that you don't want to cause problems for us? But, Subaru, you consulted us regarding Meili, didn't you? Similar to that, we'll all think together about Subaru's memories as well. Please, okay?"

Subaru: "That persuasion makes my heart ache brutally! No, but well, listen to me for a second! It's not like I'm saying this out of self-abandonment. There's a proper reason behind it!"

That was the excuse Subaru made against Emilia and Beatrice's concern. Following, Subaru raised a finger making sure everyone could see it and said "Listen".

Subaru: "I do think that me suddenly losing my memories in this situation is regrettable, and it really makes me happy that everyone wishes to get them back. However, is there anyone here who thinks this memory loss is unrelated to the existence of this Tower?"

Shaula: "Master hit his head in the *benjo* urinal and lost memories before. There's no end to it."

Subaru: "Outfielders ought to remain quiet for a second! What you said certainly can't be ignored, but its fine for now!"

Irritated by the outsider's disruption, Subaru brought the conversation back together by saying "Anyway!".

Subaru: "What I want to say is that there's a relation between the Tower and my memory loss. In other words…"

"Anastasia": "——In other words, upon fulfilling the conditions for capturing the Tower, the cause behind Natsuki-kun's memory loss or the key to it might naturally be obtained. Is that what you mean?"

Subaru: "Ah, yeah, that's right, that's right. That's what I mean!"

Subaru nodded several times upon Echidna's words, who had read into Subaru's thoughts. Hearing Echidna's view, Julius put his hand on his chin and said, "I see",

Julius: "If the Tower's mechanism has stolen Subaru's memories, we might get closer to the answer upon capturing the Tower. Or instead, the occasion of Subaru losing his memories might have happened because he got too close to the answer."

"Anastasia": "It seems quite possible. His insight at the time of capturing Taygeta, to say it clearly, he utilized knowledge we could not possibly ever possess. Due to the knowledge only Natsuki-kun possessed, he went far too ahead of even us and resultantly had his memories lost."

Subaru: "Wait wait wait wait, that would be way too much overestimation. I'm just a shut-in, you know? My specialty is like, spreading bedsheets open cleanly and sewing, you know?"

Emilia: "Ah, look, Subaru. The embroidery on these clothes, Subaru did it. Did you start remembering something upon looking at it? It's cute, right? It's Puck."

Subaru: "Hmm, embroidery of a cute cat. But, I don't really have an idea~."

Digesting the conversation which required a great deal of thinking ability, Subaru denied Emilia, who was caressing the picture of a cat embroidered on her clothes, downhearted.

Perhaps a cat she had kept and even given a name to. It seemed she had not brought it along to the Tower, so he wanted to hurry up and return safely, and make her reunite with her pet. Regardless——

Ram: "Barusu learnt something there was no need for, and as a result, lost his memories out of rashness… certainly seems convincing."

Beatrice: "Ram's way of saying it is quite thorny, but Betty generally agrees as well, in fact. Besides, Subaru's thoughts of the Tower's capture being prioritized… the prospect seems repulsive, but it does have a point, I suppose."

Subaru: "Beatrice…"

Beatrice's dissatisfaction was perhaps directed towards the situation of not giving top-most priority to Subaru's memories, after all. It made him happy from the bottom of his heart that she would think this way, but Subaru had his own reason for not prioritizing his memories—— if they leisurely searched around for his memories, they would not make it in time to prevent the Tower's tragedies.

What had happened. What was going to happen. Subaru—— no, Subaru and everyone else, must become one and prepare for those calamities.

Subaru: "And so, I want to prioritize capturing the Tower. I want everyone to understand for now as well."

Everyone: "————"

Subaru: "I don't think it fine if things remain this way either. But my problem can be dealt later. If we postpone the initial problems, we won't ever reach our goal. I want to do what we should do."

So appealed Subaru to everyone, earnestly.

He put in as many efforts as possible to cover the demerits of "Natsuki Subaru" not being here. And that he wanted everyone to lend their strengths in return.

Subaru's request had everyone at a loss for words, however——

Ram: "——Truly, such a fool."

Sighed Ram, turning her head and looking at everyone with her light-crimson eyes.

Ram: "Even after losing memories, your deplorable intellect does not change. In other words, even if your memories return, there is not much the present Barusu can contribute… Then, prioritizing Barusu's memories would only be wasteful. Let us capture the Tower, and subsequently anticipate their return."

Subaru: "Subsequently you say, don't you have any other ways to put it?"

Ram: "No. You lost your memories subsequently to attempting to capture the Tower, wasn't it? In that case, kindly find them subsequently as well. Do not cause Ram problems."

——He had promised Ram, that he would remember, he would get them back, no matter what.

That was why, he could not possibly weigh the impact Ram's heart must have received when he said he wanted to postpone matters regarding his memories. However, precisely because of that promise, Ram had said this in the first place.

She had made the promise with Subaru, despite him being a habitual breaker of promises.

"Anastasia": "Progressively speaking, it is not like we have a way to recover memories. I shall also agree with Natsuki-kun and Ram's say. Speaking optimistically here, but there is also the possibility that the memories come back with time."

Julius: "I would say a passive agreement for me. I shall not give utmost priority to it. I shall prioritize the Tower's capture. But should I find a chance to recover your memories, I shall prioritize that—— Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama must not be made to make such a sad expression."

Subaru gave a deep nod in response to Echidna's and Julius's words.

He then turned his eyes towards the duo of Emilia and Beatrice. Receiving Subaru's gaze, the two ultimately hesitated a bit, but——

Emilia: "——This time, even if it's tough, I'll be patient. But."

Subaru: "But?"

Emilia: "Sometimes, do excuse me for worrying about Subaru the most."

Subaru: "Uh… I'm sorry."

Noticing that it was equal to what he had said about keeping the worries about him for later, Subaru turned his head down in response to Emilia's request.

Seeing the two, Beatrice let out a sad sigh.

Beatrice: "Emilia said what Betty wanted to say, I suppose. That was supposed to be the most effective one, so do properly reflect on yourself, in fact."

Subaru: "——Yeah, I got it."

Henceforth, gaining everyone's approval, Subaru once again firmed his resolve for capturing the Tower.

And what Subaru wanted to first propose thus forward was——

Subaru: "——How about we all go and search, if Reid's Book is there, in the Library of Taygeta?"

Arc 6 Chapter 58 – That is That, This is This

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 2 “Taking About What Awaits”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——Let’s search and see if Reid’s Book is there, in the Library of Taygeta.

That was what Subaru had suggested as a necessity for capturing the Tower, as well as capturing their immediate problem, the Second Floor.

While sitting in a circle, everyone made a puzzled expression upon hearing that.

Emilia: “His Book…? Are you serious?”

Subaru: “Oh, Emilia, you are so serious about books. It’s funny.”

Emilia: “Oh, Subaru!”

Subaru looked at Emilia as she reacted with anger, her adorable cheeks dyed red. Feeling a sense of bliss due to her cuteness and lovable nature, Subaru then turned to everyone with “Listen”.

Subaru: “Searching for Reid’s Book, I think that is the quickest and easiest way for capturing the Second Floor. Don’t you all think so as well?”

Emilia: “I asked this earlier too, but why? I’m not against searching for the Book. But I just don’t know why we should search for Reid’s Book. Besides…”

Julius: “——First of all, would Reid Astrea’s Book truly even be in that Library?”

Hearing Subaru’s suggestion Emilia tilted her head, and Julius conveyed the latter half of her words.

Subject to everyone's gaze now, Julius looked upwards with his eyes and eyelashes which had an affinity with each other. As if glancing at the Second Floor which was, perhaps, above the ceiling.

Julius: "Though indeed hard to believe, the hero who engraved his name in history, Reid Astrea, takes the name of the Examination upon himself, and is awaiting our challenge in the Second Floor. There is no reason to doubt that he is the personage who existed four-hundred years ago, and still is that very same person… But now, there is room to question his death in my mind."

Subaru: "Seeing how lively he is, did he really even die? I guess my supposition may have been wrong considering this point…"

The truth was that Subaru only recognized the fact that he was a dead person from several hundreds of years ago after having heard about it from Emilia and the rest.

Should he have been met unknowing of his respective circumstances, it would be truly hard to believe that Reid was a dead person. First of all, he had too much life in him. He was a far too energetic dead person.

Subaru: "Regardless, I think things are at a level that we need not ponder over this point much. It's inconceivable that he'd live for several hundreds of years, and he should be dead. Am I right, Beatrice?"

Beatrice: "Despite everything, Betty has lived for four-hundred years, in fact."

Emilia: "Around a hundred years for me, I guess?"

"Anastasia": "Same here, I suppose if my birth would be considered then it would make around four-hundred years. Though the time I was conscious for was short."

Shaula: "Me too! Me too, Master! I've been waiting here in vain for four-hundred years! I was so lonely! I demand a hug for those four-hundred years!"

Subaru: "So many characters who've lived long!? Even Emilia-chan!?"

His objective was to seek agreement but unknowingly brought objection, leaving him with his jaw hanging.

He had never thought that over half of his party members would be characters who had lived for long. The party's average age jumped up so much that it was not even a joke.

Especially when it came to Beatrice to Emilia, he was unable to shut his hanging jaw.

He merely thought that he had to come to terms with it.

Subaru: "I-is that so, Emilia-chan is a half-elf… I'm also convinced she's an unparalleled beauty. The rule goes that half-elves are pretty and live long, after all."

Emilia: "Um, mhm, yes… Subaru, even without memories, you aren't scared of half-elves?"

Subaru: "When you ask about being scared, then I'm scared of that cuteness. It's seriously lethal. If I look at you when I'm half-asleep and have my guard down, then my eyes might go blind. To be honest I'm having to blink frequently even now."

Emilia: "…Geez, you idiot."

Scolded by the slightly pouting Emilia, Subaru got lost in thoughts of this ambience feeling nice, but braced himself up to make sure he did not make such a foolish misunderstanding.

Emilia was extremely kind, so much one could easily get the careless impression that she had feelings for Subaru. His beating heart, swayed away. Well, it was fine if it was beating at least.

Subaru: "Haaa~… at such spots, you have a sense of relief like I've returned to my parents' home, Beatrice."

Beatrice: "That feels somewhat unacceptable, I suppose… But well, since you're patting Betty's head, you'll be let off the hook this time, in fact."

After being thrown into disarray by Emilia, his heartbeat soothed upon caressing Beatrice. It seemed that Beatrice's mood had also been restored, so it served both ends.

And, upon the conversation being derailed, Echidna spoke up with "Would you mind if I say something", and raised her hand.

“Anastasia”: “It is not like I do not understand Julius’s worry, but I want to earnestly endorse the supposition that Reid is a dead person. Though it is simply the impression I got when I got in contact with him personally.”

Subaru: “And the reason for that would be?”

“Anastasia”: “First, just as what Natsuki-kun had said, I cannot conceive that Reid Astrea belongs to a species which lives for long. He is a person who goes beyond norms in multiple ways, but he is still a human. Second, his personality.”

Emilia: “Personality? Like his reaaally energetic nature?”

“Anastasia”: “Energetic to an extent which is rather unheard of. I cannot imagine that the possessor of such a hearty and lively personality would quietly seclude himself in the Tower for four-hundred years. The fact that he had not even met her… Shaula, would mean that he always remained in that one room of the Second Floor. It is very hard to believe. This is my arbitrary impression, but he would probably leave in three days.”

Subaru: “Ah.”

In response to Echidna’s views, Subaru responded with a voice filled with acceptance and reconciliation.

Emilia and the others also thought back to Reid’s bustling attitude. They all seemed to be convinced by the credibility of Echidna’s views.

Observing them all, Echidna turned her pale-cerulean gaze towards Julius.

“Anastasia”: “So, that is the impression I have, Julius, do you agree?”

Julius: “It is impossible to not agree. Certainly, considering Reid Astrea’s real impression, it does not seem like he would stay at the same place for such a long time. The reason behind that is because his present self is tied to the Tower’s Examinations… is that how we should consider it.”

Subaru: “His existence is tied to the Tower, huh.”

Hearing Echidna and Julius’s conversation, he recalled the denouement of the previous loop.

Within the Tower caught in the flames of great chaos and mayhem, Reid was walking around freely and boasted about going outside. Without any diffidence he had descended from the Second Floor to the Fourth Floor, and even pushed the back of Subaru's head.

To Subaru, it did not seem like his freedom was constrained whatsoever.

The truth was that had he not possessed the last bit of reluctance, he would have unmistakably left the Tower, full of life, his legs at the very same pace—— Yet he did not do so, for what reason.

Julius: "——? What is it, do you need something from me?"

Subaru: "No…"

Julius: "Heh. I believe I also have eyes, a nose, ears and lips on my face, but is there any strangeness in that?"

Subaru: "Ah, unlike Emilia-chan's they aren't cute at all, so they've failed the screening. Regardless…"

The conversation had drifted far too distant from the main issue at hand, with that notion Subaru turned his gaze away from Julius.

And once again returned the topic to Reid's Book.

Subaru: "Well then, now that we've all agreed that Reid's a lively dead, then let's go back to what I first said. Taygeta has Books of the Dead, am I right?"

Ram: "That is the understanding as of now. Memories of the dead flow into the reader's head… Barusu and Julius have confirmed that much. Though unfortunately, it seems you lost memories of that as well."

Subaru: "I said I'm sorry, don't hold it against me—— And, that is where the focus of this conversation lies."

Subaru pointed his finger towards Ram. Perhaps finding that gesture unpleasant, Ram twisted his finger, making Subaru taste ache and scream "Gahhh~!".

Right beside their exchange, Beatrice raised a soft voice, "Ah",

Beatrice: “So that’s what it is, I suppose!”

Emilia: “Beatrice, did you get what Subaru wants to say?”

Beatrice: “Yes, in fact. So that’s what it is, I suppose—— In other words, it means utilizing Reid’s Book of the Dead as an essential point for capturing Reid, in fact.”

Subaru: “Yeah.”

Caressing his twisted finger, Subaru affirmed Beatrice’s words with a pained expression.

Hearing that explanation, Emilia rounded her amethyst eyes and whispered “Is that so”.

——Utilizing the Book of the Dead, and capturing the dead himself.

To summarize, not only was the Book of the Dead a record of one’s lifetime, but also elaborately recorded why that person had died, a “strategy guide”.

And should it be put in Subaru’s words, a veteran player who had already died four times—— the cause of death was not something which could be evaded easily.

Subaru: “So if we read his Book of the Dead we’ll get to know his cause of death. That would serve as a great strategy. The Books of the Dead may be, in a roundabout way, for that purpose alone, you know?”

“Anastasia”: “That is… something I did not notice. But now that you mention it, certainly. They have gone out of their way to deploy a dead person as the Examiner. It would not be odd if that was the aim.”

Subaru: “Well, you don’t have to accept it that readily…”

Subaru rounded his eyes and gave a bitter smile as response to Echidna, who commended him far more than what he had anticipated.

Regardless, the situation was such that they could either find a way to capture, or be able to define a bypass to evade it entirely.

Subaru: “Ah, this is something I’m saying with personal conviction… not my present self who doesn’t have memories, but the me with memories must’ve also tried to test this strategy as well, I think.”

Beatrice: "…That's convincing, I suppose. There's no way Subaru wouldn't test such a loophole, in fact."

Ram: "That being a road toward evil, not a road toward righteousness. Certainly seems like something Barusu would do. Ram is also convinced."

Emilia: "Mhm, yeah. Things inequitable, that's something Subaru's rea~lly good at."

Subaru: "Who even says «inequitable» these days…"

Emilia: "——Hk!"

He distorted his cheeks in response to the unblurred assessment of "Natsuki Subaru", and Emilia's suddenly twinkled as a reaction. Subaru was surprised by her reaction, but Emilia immediately afterwards touched her cheek with her finger.

Emilia: "Ugh, this won't do, this won't do. Subaru's the one who has it rough the most, after all. I've got to get myself together…"

Ram: "Emilia-sama, your feelings are understandable, but your cheeks are flushed red."

Taking Emilia's hand, Ram directed her attention towards what was happening with her.

Emilia or Beatrice had been giving overly sensitive reactions from time to time, and the reason behind that was perhaps because of the vestiges of "Natsuki Subaru" they could feel.

He truly felt guilty and apologetic. He wanted to return "Natsuki Subaru" to Emilia and the others as soon as possible.

Regardless, in accordance with Emilia and the others' impression as well, it was highly probable that the Subaru who had been there until yesterday had arrived at a strategy of utilizing the Book of the Dead.

Hearing Subaru's thoughts, Meili then said "Ah" with her hand on her mouth.

Meili: "…This reminds me, last night I saw onii-san in Taygeta with lots of Books scattered arouuund~. I wonder if that's what it was fooor~."

Julius: "Last night, Subaru was in Taygeta? Hmm…"

Subaru: “By the way, did you get to see what Book I was reading?”

Meili: “Ummm~… I don’t know that muuuch~. Really sorry.”

Meili closed her eyes as she remained sitting on Shaula’s lap, getting her head caressed.

Waving his hand, gesturing “Don’t worry about it”, Subaru referred to “*my*” memories, which were not his own, and arrived at the same conclusion.

Among the memories of Meili that he had confirmed with the Book of the Dead, despite having seen Subaru with multiple Books scattered around him, he had been unable to see the specifics of that point onward.

Therefore, he wasn’t very disappointed by the answer to his question. However, it was certain that there had been some sort of abnormality in “Natsuki Subaru”, at the time he had been in the Library of Taygeta.

Before he scattered the Books around, or perhaps shortly after that——

Julius: “What are the chances of that act itself having some connection with the loss of memories?”

“Anastasia”: “A lot of them were scattered around, huh… Something like reading Books of the Dead beyond a maximum possible limit filled up the entire place in which memories are stored, so they overflowed; that would not be possible, right?”

Subaru: “I want to think that it shouldn’t be possible, but I can’t say it isn’t possible. Anyhow, I have amnesia!”

Julius and Echidna sighed at the same time before Subaru, who had puffed up his chest and raised a single finger.

They had come to a standstill in the discussion of his memory loss, but Subaru did not doubt that the cause of his memory loss was the Books.

That was why, he thought of avoiding letting anyone else read Reid’s Book of the Dead should they actually find it.

If someone had to read it, then it must be Subaru, who had already had his memories disappear once, it would not be of much consequence should they disappear again—— No, by now, Subaru also had too many memories he could not let disappear.

Subaru: "————"

The events of the previous loop, the events prior to the previous loop.

Along with that, the things he had committed to his heart in these surroundings, or the promise with Ram, and what he pledged to Meili.

What was this, already hands full of stuff which must not be forgotten despite merely being here for a few days and repeating four times?

This was why memories were valuable, priceless, and difficult to part ways with—— They must not be forgotten.

Emilia: "Subaru?"

Subaru: "Uh, ah, I'm alright I'm alright, I'm alright. Erm, ahem."

Upon Emilia's call, Subaru awoke from his silence and regained his composure. Then clearing his throat and glancing at everyone's faces,

Subaru: "With all that being said, I propose heading to Taygeta. That guy, hero of the past or the legendary so-and-so or whatever, will have had his achievements in life handed out to the hereafter. Instead, there'll also be any failures or weaknesses he left behind, and we'll straightforwardly attack those points as a fame tax."

Ram: "You sure are confident, speaking of something you've heard someplace else."

Subaru: "Hehe, it's 'cause I never thought there'd be a chance to use a way to realistically capture this Tower. If the opponent's true name is understood, then even the cause of their death and what they treasure can be determined. This is what you truly call a modern-day knowledge *urazawa*[186]…!"

[186] Engrish flip. Means "(video game) cheat" (裏技), originally "チート" (cheat).

Emilia: “True name?”

Beatrice: “What they treasure, I suppose…”

Emilia and Beatrice tilted their heads hearing Subaru’s words, who had his fists clenched with strength.

That was mere persiflage, so he did not get into its details, but it was unmistakable that Reid Astrea, in this world, was a personage famous enough to have had his name etched into history.

“Anastasia”: “So in other words, that guy’s cause of defeat is a fame tax… That is quite novel for a weakness, isn’t it?”

Ram: “——Barusu’s aim is understood. Ram is convinced as well. Though Ram certainly has some anxiety about it.”

“Anastasia”: “It is worth trying, huh. My, oh my. Simply thinking about how difficult it will be to find a single book out of that vast a quantity of books makes me feel heavy.”

Ignoring Subaru’s frivolous comments, Ram and Echidna raised their hips. Emilia, Beatrice, Meili and Shaula followed shortly afterwards.

Subaru also got on his knees and stood up, and then glanced at Julius, who was lagging behind.

Subaru: “What happened? Are you against it?”

Julius: “…No, there is no other breakthrough solution either. Also considering that the proposal was initiated by you, I shall recognize its validity.”

Subaru: “But, there’s still something on your mind?”

Julius: “——That would be, a problem of my own. I want you to disregard it.”

Shaking his head left and right, Julius stood up at that spot.

Since it was impossible to disregard it even when told to do so, Subaru only got more concerned——

Subaru: “I’ll disregard it, for now—— By the way, with the exception of the Book of the Dead, just how famous is Reid? Feels like it’d be at a crazy level.”

Julius: “Seems like that was quite the powerful memory. For memories that were spilled in bits and pieces, seems like some are left… Reid Astrea, is one of the Three Heroes who defeated the Witch who existed in the past.”

Subaru: “The Sage, Shaula, the Divine Dragon, Volcanica, the Sword Saint, Reid…”

Shaula: “Sage refers to Master, not me.”

Subaru: “Going by your logic, I’m also several hundreds of years old? I’ve lived a time way too shocking between leaving the convenience store and waking up in the morning…”

Rather than simply taking Shaula’s speech with a grain of salt, Subaru ignored it after tasting the flavor of only a small percentage of what she had to say, and dug deeper into the legend of Reid, whereby he was spoken of as one of the Three Great Heroes.

With respect to that topic, Emilia and the others’ glances were directed towards Julius.

Julius accepted their gazes, and whilst touching his bangs,

Julius: “Certainly, there is no time to recite the legends Reid Astrea etched into posterity in all parts of the world. Speaking of things he was famous for… the fight in which he slayed a hundred dragons, or his battle achievement of six thousand undefeated victories recorded in the battle arena of Gladiator Island. An existence called to be a fierce god, and the victor of drinking competitions, such varieties are also there.”

Subaru: “All of that sounds so stupid, but after having met the real deal…”

Julius: “It feels that they have not been exaggerated. After knowing that strength, unhesitatingly he would… No.”

Subaru: “——?”

Julius: “Within what I am aware of, all anecdotes regarding him retell his achievements and such. His personality, or records of humanly failures and defeats, there are no memories of things like those.”

Touching his bangs, that was how Julius brought the display of information to a finish.

Hearing what he had spoken of made Subaru tremble slightly, due to the fact that he had no records of defeat. It would be fine if there were no such records left, it surely could not be that he simply had never been defeated.

Subaru shuddered, thinking that him being undefeated for his entire life was a relevant possibility.

Subaru: “Oh, we’re here.”

Whilst they were conversing, they arrived at the room which had the staircase connecting to Taygeta.

Further up would be the Library filled with Books of the Dead, and the Third Floor Taygeta would welcome them.

Subaru: “——Ram, would you mind guiding everyone for a bit? There’s something I want to talk about with Julius.”

Ram: “With Julius?”

Ram furrowed her eyebrows in response to Subaru, who had halted his feet.

Julius was also surprised to hear those words, but for the moment he did not object to it. Seeing them Ram straitened her light-crimson eyes and sighed, looking back into Subaru’s black eyes.

A sigh which revealed grief, or perhaps, understanding,

Ram: “Make sure you make it quick. It will get completely out of hand if Ram and the others also lose memories upon reaching there like Barusu.”

Subaru: “Don’t say such scary stuff. Though if amnesiac Ram becomes meeker and more elegant, it’ll sure be a sight to see.”

Ram: “Ram does not, intend to forget, anything more.”

Subaru: “…You’re right. Please make sure you don’t get close to any weird book if you spot one.”

With that exchange done, Ram was the first one to start climbing the staircase.

For the moment he did not worry about misjudgments, should it be left to her. Amongst all the party members, he assessed Ram to be utmost worthy of such trust. That being said——

Subaru: “Meili, be lady-like. Hold hands with Emilia-chan or something at least.”

Meili: “That, is really upsettiiing~. You don’t have to treat me like a burden like thiiis. Naked onee-san already has grabbed my hand, even though I don’t wanna grab heeer’s~.”

Pouting, with one of her hands taken by Shaula and the other by Emilia, Meili was taken to Taygeta. Behind her was Beatrice, and last in line was Echidna, who looked back upon stepping onto the staircase.

“Anastasia”: “Natsuki-kun.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

“Anastasia”: “Please do be gentle.”

Leaving those words behind, Echidna headed to the upper floor.

Subaru scratched his head whilst viewing her back. It seemed that Echidna had probably seen through the reason why Subaru had Julius remain here.

And with the departure of all the women, the only ones left standing before the staircase were the duo of Subaru and Julius,

Julius: “So, what did you want to talk about? You have gone out of your way to keep Emilia-sama and the others at a distance, can I believe that it is something very important?”

Subaru: “Something very important… well, I guess so. Probably.”

Julius: “What an unclear way of speaking.”

Subaru: “It’s the kind of thing that’s difficult to speak clearly.”

Subaru scratched his black hair in front of Julius, who had his back turned to the staircase.

The reason why he had Julius stop here was to confirm certain things. This also included all of what he had been concerned about in the earlier conversation as well——

Subaru: “————”

Julius: “Subaru?”

Subaru: “Just wait. I’m organizing my mind right now.”

Subaru pondered, pulling the thread of the problem which was tangled greater than expected.

He had left the search for the book onto Emilia and the others, and had told Julius to stop here. The main focus of it being, of course, Reid Astrea.

Along with that, floating in Subaru’s mind was the previous loop, one of the acts of this great battle royale.

——Having gained freedom, Reid would battle Julius one-on-one, choosing that to be the reason for his final bit of reluctance.

Despite there being countless obstructions in the situation, that had been a scene truly deserving being called a one-on-one battle. However, the difference in their actual ability, perhaps including this aspect of being a psychological issue too, was absolute.

On top of that, he had heard that Julius had already fought, suffered and swallowed defeat at the hands of Reid once. Adding that to the situation, Reid held some sort of attachment towards Julius.

Whether that was towards the person named Julius, he could not help but feel that was the key to deciphering Reid—— However, the problem was how to utilize it.

Subaru: “Ah, what do you think about Reid? Do you like him?”

Julius: “——What significance does that question hold, I wonder.”

Subaru: “Well, I just tried making the atmosphere less serious. The real one needs to be said just a bit differently—— what I really mean is, do you have the intent to win against Reid.”

Julius: “——Hk.”

What Subaru had spoken with one eye closed, made Julius widen his yellow eyes. Witnessing vehement turmoil levitate in those eyes, Subaru took a short exhale.

He felt this to be both expected, and unexpected, at the same time.

Subaru: “Disregarding stuff I’m not aware of myself… this is a situation where cowering away in fright isn’t allowed, you know. They say the habit of losing starts becoming difficult to get rid of.”

Julius: “Subaru, you are…”

Subaru: “Wicked, eh. The truth is that even I, after taking time and doing some stuff, do think that your daunted heart must be made to stand up again. I do think so, but there’s no such time. You get it, right?”

Julius: “————”

Receiving Subaru’s question, Julius stiffened his cheeks and halted his breath.

Subaru and Julius interpreted the implication of the words “There’s no such time” differently, yet he did possess identical unrest.

And surely, this was something the Subaru of up until yesterday was unable to do. Speaking the words which had to be conveyed to this wounded man, who did not realize the restlessness of his own heart, and making him realize.

Perhaps, Natsuki Subaru was doing what “Natsuki Subaru” could not.

Believing that this would be a certain strike, for breaking through the deadlock of this obstructive situation——

Subaru: “I’ll say it clearly, Julius. If you ask why, then that’s because, right now, I’m invincible.”

Julius: “Invincible, huh… That is, quite a large thing to say.”

Subaru: “I can say big stuff because I’ve got no ties of obligations. I can’t stand seeing you all curled up after you’ve looked at me in the eye, looked at Echidna in the eye, and have spoken about Reid. I’ve got a nature that makes me influence people so I can’t really say for the others, but I’ll just close my eyes and say it clearly.”

Julius: “——I shall listen.”

Inhaling, adjusting his seated posture, Julius stared towards Subaru.

Accepting that earnest gaze, Subaru resumed.

Subaru: “That is that, this is this.”

Julius: “——Huh.”

Julius gave a dumbfounded response to Subaru’s confident declaration.

With that Julius before him, Subaru opened his arms wide and,

Subaru: “I know it got awkward since you were looking at me. The me until yesterday probably was responsible for doing something to you. What that me from up until yesterday did, won’t disappear from this world, but it has indeed disappeared from my mind.”

Julius: “I, suppose so. That is correct. However, I am…”

Subaru: “Hear it till the end. Since I’m in that state, there’s a need for us to establish our relationship from scratch. At the very least, that goes for the relationship with my present self. Forget about the me who was there until yesterday for now.”

Julius: “————”

With the tides of conversation taking a rather violent turn, Julius yet remained unable to recover from drowning in his earlier unease.

A terribly overbearing logic. He had not managed to fully convey what he wanted to whatsoever.

The truth was that Subaru was borrowing the strength of Emilia, Beatrice, Julius and the rest—— whom had been influenced by “Natsuki Subaru”, those being his achievements.

However, right now he would borrow merely the positive aspects of that influence, and discard the negative ones. Because——

Subaru: “In our party, you’re the strongest. That’s why, it’ll be you who’ll be clashing with Reid. Even if we find the strategy guide all well and good, the fighting will still be on you.”

Of course, he had also considered Reid’s attachment, the opponent’s desire to have a one-on-one battle with Julius.

However, Subaru did not intend to surrender this spot. Even if he ignored the fact that Emilia had already secured victory, Ram, Shaula, Echidna, Meili, Beatrice, out of everyone Subaru knew, surely nobody would be willing to surrender before that scene.

Subaru: “I understand you’re scared. I also understand you’re perplexed. I deeply apologize on behalf of the me from up until yesterday—— Consider all of that, switch over, and fight.”

Julius: “…I have, already lost to him, twice.”

Subaru: “I know. But, next time, win.”

Julius: “————”

The number of defeats was greater by one from what he had known.

However, in this circumstance, it was unrelated and of little significance.

Subaru: “Our calculations will eventually be wrong if you don’t win. I thought of various match-ups in my mind, but before having the girls do their best, we, the men, will have to do our best, or it’ll be a disgrace to Knighthood.”

Julius: “——Disgrace. My current self, bringing disgrace to Knighthood, huh.”

Before Subaru, who had his fist clenched out, Julius closed his eyes and whispered with a soft tone, lowering his head.

Astonished, confused, wounded, defeated, and now, finally, by means of a logic akin to violently being grabbed by the collars, Julius was trifled by Subaru’s words.

That was something which made him change his elegant expression, into one far unlike what Subaru had expected——

Julius: “Just as how Miss Ram had stated, I have started to doubt whether you have truly lost your memories. Or perhaps instead, are you pretending to not have memories in order to stop me from abandoning the sword out of fear?”

Subaru: “I’d go so far, even making Emilia-chan’s smiling face clouded? You retard, I’d never do something so roundabout. Besides, above all, even without me doing that, you’d still not let go of the sword and fight for everyone, wouldn’t you.”

Julius: “That is… contradicting. You are truly trying to put strain on my frightened heart right now, huh.”

Subaru: “No. That’s wrong. What you lack isn’t courage. You’ve got courage properly packed up in here—— what you lack is the determination to win. The spirit of rivalry, competitiveness.”

Subaru got one step closer, having his clenched out fist touch Julius’s chest.

Receiving his words and his fist, Julius inhaled.

Julius: “————”

Subaru’s words possessed no lies.

In the earlier loop, desperate as it was, despite being driven into a corner against the Witchbeasts and Reid, Julius did not let go of his sword, did not lose to despair, and conveyed the words “I am leaving that to you” to Subaru.

And should the other side of those words be seen, they could not mean anything else but “Leave this to me”.

Under those circumstances, Julius had certainly said.

——To leave Reid Astrea, up to him.

And witnessing him say so, had been the end.

That was why——

Subaru: "…I haven't seen the settlement. Neither my memories of everything until yesterday. Therefore, I've not been acquainted to you losing to Reid, even once."

Julius, Julius Juukulius, had not lost.

This Knight, this man, had not lost even once, in front of Natsuki Subaru.

That was why, no matter what anyone may say, Natsuki Subaru would not surrender the settlement.

He would persist expecting Julius Juukulius, to defeat Reid Astrea.

Subaru: "I'll leave Reid Astrea up to you. Defeat that utmost troublesome enemy. In exchange, I'll… try my hand, using my own ways, at everything else."

Julius: "————"

Subaru: "Can't you hear me, Julius? Answer your friend's expectations."

Earlier had been to put the weight of expectations on him, now was to forcefully drive hope into him.

Subaru's fist prodded Julius's chest once again.

That single gesture, and Julius touched his chest.

Continuing to have his hand touch his chest, Julius stepped back, and took a deep breath.

A deep, deep, deep, deep breath, and,

Julius: "…How come you, having lost memories of everything until yesterday, are able to expect that much from me?"

Subaru: "That's… the kind of *eizou*[187] I had. Kind of like my impression. Like your looks, the way you talk, the way you behave, what you wield, what you wear, the way you eat, the way you walk, it's the art of synthesizing from all that kind of stuff."

[187] Engrish flip. Means "mental image" (映像), originally "イメージ" (image).

Subaru replied without alluding to the events of the previous loop, making him clench his chest in ache.

Without even planning to, both Subaru and Julius faced each other while touching their own chests with their hand. At the same pace, Julius corrected his posture whilst still having his hand at his chest, and slowly raised his hips.

With elegant, beautiful, natural conduct, seemingly something a Knight in some story would do.

Julius: “Impression, huh.”

Subaru: “Y-yeah. It’s the way you appear. Your everything, makes me expect this much.”

Julius: “Is that so… My appearance, made you think that way, is it not.”

The tone of Julius’s voice changed, as he remained to have his head lowered.

Until then, Julius’s tone of voice gave the impression of being touched someplace difficult to touch, but now, though extremely slight, strength returned to it, softness lodged abode, warmth budded into it once again.

Giving such an impression to Subaru, Julius raised his head and looked forward. And——

Julius: “Forgotten by the world, forgotten by you, the only one who remembered me, failing to ascertain my master’s existence, it became unclear where my self was. However, despite being in that state—— everything I have fostered until now, has not disappeared. That is what I would like to say, at least.”

Subaru: “Not so wise or collected, but that’s what the nuance is.”

Julius accepted Subaru’s shoddy and convoluted words in a wise, polished form.

Subaru had thought that he had not been able to convey one-hundred-percent of what he wanted to, just a moment ago. However, he felt that the listener had selected something close to those one-hundred percent he wanted to convey.

Subaru: “Well, it was kinda like a conversation on notions, I guess you could call it a psychological discussion, but it felt like the psychological problem was serious, so was I correct?”

Julius: “Heh. Why would you become timid with regards to that? Were you not supposed to be invincible, I wonder?”

Subaru: “Well, even if Mario picks up a star, if he falls into a hole he still dies, you know…[188]”

Though Julius furrowed his eyebrows hearing the illogical metaphor, he did not press further.

It seemed like that was something also associated to “Natsuki Subaru”, and that it was an understood notion to ignore his meaningless banter, so it felt unquestionably strange. Regardless——

Subaru: “Have you become a bit more forward-looking now?”

Julius: “Well, I wonder. Ultimately, your words were destitute in concreteness and were more of psychological discussion, and, it is not as if all of the various things which happened to me have changed dramatically.”

Subaru: “You…”

Julius: “However.

Pausing his words there, Julius narrowed his eyes whilst looking at Subaru.

And, suddenly loosening his lips,

Julius: “——That is that, this is this.”

With unbefitting words, he concluded this exchange.

[188] Super Mario Brothers reference. Probably to the first game; the star makes the player character invincible against opposing monsters (Koopas and Goombas), but falling into a hole means the player loses a life.

Arc 6 Chapter 59 – What Smiles in the White World

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 2 “In the Future”, Parts 7-8

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——That is that, this is this.

Ending their conversation with that, Subaru and Julius both experienced a strange sensation.

The truth was, he did not know if he had managed to reach close to Julius’s convoluted heart. What he ended up thinking of was whether there could have been better words, a more perfect way of action, a further beautiful way of connection.

A way of action which could have overwritten this absurd reality, instead of reaching a reckless conclusion like “that is that, this is this”.

Julius: “But, it is very befitting of you. For better or worse, you see.”

Subaru: “…Is that so, eh. You know, how much of what befits me overlaps with the me until yesterday actually quite concerns my present self’s identity.”

Julius: “In terms of the establishment of one’s self, my former self was very much greatly shaken as well. As one who has already tasted the same crisis, let me give you some advice—— That is that, this is this.”

Subaru: “Oh, shut up!”

Subaru howled in response to Julius’s ridicule of their earlier banter. Julius shrugged his shoulders at his objection and seemingly had an air of composure.

Indeed, it appeared he seriously had managed to make his heart stand up once again a bit. Although they had been words quite immature and maladroit, it was all thanks to the listener being apt.

Regardless, whilst the two of them interacted in that fashion——

???: “Master-sama~, are you doneee?”

Subaru: “Oh? Shaula?”

Behind them, peeking from the top of the staircase leading to the Third Floor was Shaula, calling out to him.

With her black braid dangling down as she peered down to the lower floor, she was looking at them with her voluptuous chest touching the floor.

Subaru: “Why so well-behaved? Were you that kind of a character?”

Shaula: “Well, when Master-sama’s talking to someone one-to-one, then that’s when it’s some real solid talk, isn’t it? So I was told before to stay away ‘cause I *kowasu*[189] the mood if I’m there, so I’m just abiding by that… Oh right, Master-sama has forgotten everything!”

Subaru: “Solid talk and *kowasu* the mood, eh…”

Subaru furrowed his eyebrows in response to Shaula, who was laughing earnestly and openly. Seeing Subaru, Shaula then jumped and descended from the staircase in one breath.

Jumping over two hundred stairs, Shaula made a silent landing onto the floor. She then proceeded to stand beside Subaru and grab his arm into her chest.

Subaru: “I’ve told you several times already, stop doing this kind of stuff. Emilia-chan will misunderstand.”

Julius: “Hmm, Emilia-sama, huh?”

Subaru: “Don’t hmm me. There’s just that small possibility, you know. Even if it’s a possibility as absurd as finding a needle in a desert, it’s still a possibility.”

[189] Engrish flip. Means “break” (壊す), originally “ブレイク” (break).

Saying so, Subaru forcefully unfastened Shaula's arms. Upon that gesture, Shaula said "Ahh~" and pouted with a dissatisfied expression,

Shaula: "Master-sama's so mean. Treating me like this when I'm thirsting for warmth."

Subaru: "If you're thirsting for warmth then go hug Meili or Beatrice. The body temperatures of both of them are pretty warm since they're kids… Beatrice, she's pretty warm for being four-hundred years old."

Bringing that to light by connecting the shocking truth that had been confirmed earlier and the truth he had ascertained several times, Subaru was shaken by Beatrice's little girl energy.

The conclusion, was that she would always remain a little girl no matter how many years she may live.

Shaula: "Boo. I won't report anything to the cold Master-sama. It's the disciple's strike. The manager's to listen to the voice of the workers."

Subaru: "Ah, geez, I get it, I get it. I'll positively handle and improve the labor conditions, so let's hear your report. Did something happen?"

Shaula: "It's suspicious whether you'll really improve them. But but, I'm an obedient, cute disciple so I'll answer! ——Reid's Book has been found."

Subaru: "…Huh?"

So articulated Shaula as she distanced her braid and shoulders away.

Subaru widened his eyes upon how unexpected those words were. Julius also widened his eyes just as much.

Julius: "Miss Shaula, what did you say just now?"

Shaula: "Liiike~ Iii~ saiiid~, I'm saying Reid's Book has been found. Something like the Book with that scum's name on it, I personally think it'd be better to just burn it and throw it away. You think so too, right, Master-sama?"

Subaru: "Ha, ha, ha…"

Shaula: “Hahaha? Master-sama, is that a laugh?”

Lowering her hips, Shaula looked at Subaru’s face from below. Looking back into her black eyes teeming with rustic simplicity and naivete, Subaru opened his mouth.

And shouted.

Subaru: “——That should be the first thing you say!!”

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???: “Ah! Look, Subaru! We found Reid’s Book!”

Said Emilia with a wide smile and voice like the chime of a silver bell, noticing Subaru climb up the staircase.

What she pointed toward with her hand was the bulky book Ram was carrying in her arms. It seemed that was Reid’s Book of the Dead. It got found rather quickly.

The library, filled with a vast number of books no matter where one looked—— it was unknown for how long it had existed, but if this recorded all of the dead in this world, then the quantity of books was rather suitable.

Subaru: “Good job finding the Book we aimed for amongst all of this. While I was busy with Julius’s *jinseisoudan… Ryouhou*? *Houkouryouhou*[190]? Something like that.”

Emilia: “*Jinsaysoodan*…? Ah, I don’t really get it but, hehehe, isn’t it quite something. But, I’m not the one who found it.”

Emilia, with her chest puffed up, stated the achievement wasn’t hers.

[190] Multiple Engrish flips. First one means “counselling service” (人生相談), originally “カウンセリング” (counselling), second means “therapy” (療法), originally “セラピー” (therapy), third means “aromatherapy” (芳香療法), originally “アロマテラピー” (aromatherapy).

What that implied was immediately made clear by her subsequent actions. Emilia gently pushed forward the dark-blue haired young girl hugging her waist,

Emilia: “Meili was the one who found it. Isn’t it meritorious?”

Subaru: “Who even says «meritorious» these days… But that aside, so Meili found it! That’s certainly meritorious! Good work.”

Accepting Emilia’s words, Subaru then automatically commended the achiever as well.

With her arms around Emilia’s slim waist, and whilst she was being caressed by her, Meili averted her eyes out of embarrassment in response to Subaru’s words.

Meili: “N-not really. It was a Book that just caught my eye, and I just happened to mention it. It got found just slightly quickly, so I don’t think it’s anything greaaat~.”

Subaru: “Don’t be stupid. You can brag about what you did well just fine! Really good, Meili. You’ve nullified the negative of trying to push me back to zero right away, huh!”

Meili: “By something this siiimple~!?”

Meili widened her eyes in surprise, as Subaru overbearingly brushed her head. Meili didn’t take a liking to it, saying “My hair will get disheveleeed~!” but that simply made Subaru relax his cheeks.

Subaru: “It’s fine. It was just an attempt anyway, and you compensated for it with a big achievement, let’s agree to that.”

Meili: “————”

Subaru: “So, Reid’s Book… nobody’s looked into it yet, right?”

Meili tried saying something in response to the smiling Subaru, but remained with her mouth closed.

Whilst keeping Meili’s faltering within his vision, Subaru turned his attention to the Book for the moment, which was the root subject.

The Book Ram was carrying—— the patterns drawn at its back cover, those were characters Subaru was unable to read.

Neither did it possess a bizarre sensation like giving Reid's vibes upon a single glance.

Subaru: "No matter how unconventional the actual person themselves may be, the Book recording them doesn't resound that, huh."

Ram: "If the binding was meaninglessly over the top, or if the title aggressively self-asserted itself then it would have been easier to find. It is helpful that Meili made up for that and found it."

Subaru: "See, look, Meili! Even Ram's complimenting you! That one and only Ram! This Ram! You really can be glad about it… Ghergh."

Ram: "Kindly shut up."

With his side gouged by her fingers, Subaru collapsed in agony at the same spot. And after quietening Subaru, Ram lightly shook the Book in her arms,

Ram: "There is what happened with Barusu. It would be a disaster if one did something rash and lost memories like Barusu did. That is why, it has been shown to nobody."

Subaru: "W-we, haven't confirmed if the reason for my memory loss, is that, Book…"

Ram: "Haa!"

The comment, which did not convince him alone, was slashed down by Ram's laugh.

The truth was, it was nearly impossible that his memory loss and the Book of the Dead were unrelated. Even if they had found the Book they were looking for, it was only natural that they would have disputes over how it was to be utilized.

???: "So, the Book has properly been found, in fact. What remains is using it, I suppose."

So remarked Beatrice, having the same train of thought as Subaru.

Receiving her words, everyone's joy for having discovered the Book was then coated with nervousness. This one book was capable of causing memory loss should its usage be mistaken. That was the same as gulping down a medicine of unknown identity. Reluctance was natural.

???: "So should we, discuss and conjecture the dangers?"

Subaru: "Discuss and conjecture the dangers… is that even possible, Echidna?"

"Anastasia": "Conjecture is possible only on the basis of events that have already occurred and bits and pieces of information, though."

Saying so, Echidna raised her hands and shrugged.

Afterwards she raised her index finger,

"Anastasia": "First, the riskiness of the Book of the Dead… just as what Natsuki-kun's present condition indicates, there exists the possibility of losing one's memories. From what Natsuki-kun stated, the memories which spill and fall out are rather in fragments… Though I suppose, in this case it would be better to call the remaining memories to be in fragments?"

The portion which spilled over and the portion which remained, the amount of the former was overwhelmingly greater. What Echidna had said was correct.

However, what slightly deviated from the truth here was that Subaru used memory loss and its remnants as camouflage in order to hide Return by Death.

The truth was, the first time around, when he had lost memories in its truest sense, Subaru had lost memories of everything—— of after arriving in the different world, rather.

Henceforth, it would be better to think that the amnesia made no pardons. Right now, the only actual precedent set was that Subaru merely did not lose himself due to the memory loss.

Had he lost not only episodic memories, but also his own self.

When he thought about that, he shuddered.

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Norvak (source)

——At the same time, why had he not lost memories of just the different world but those of the original world as well, that question also posed within Subaru's mind.

"Anastasia": "The reason for the amnesia is also possible to speculate about. First, memories are erased as indemnification for reading the Book of the Dead. That is difficult to consider, keeping in mind the differences in cases of Natsuki-kun and Julius, who have both read the Books."

Beatrice: "Don't really want to think about it, but… there's also the possibility of losing a small bit of memories, in fact. If what's being read and the memories that get erased are proportional in amount, then that induction would also be logical, I suppose."

Julius: "I agree. In other words, the reason why Subaru's and my circumstances are different, is due to the difference in the quantity of Books read… It would coincide with the Subaru whom Miss Meili had witnessed last night."

Beatrice: "————"

Beatrice objected to Echidna's inference, which was then affirmed by Julius.

Listening to his intelligent party members converse, Subaru nodded in response.

Subaru: "In order words, the voluminousness of the Books read possibly has something to do with the loss of memories?"

"Anastasia": "It means that would also be a possible way of interpretation. In the case of this inference being affirmed, the ones who should force their eyes through Reid's Book of the Dead are us, who have not read a single Book of the Dead before. It may be dangerous for Natsuki-kun and Julius, who have already read them."

Subaru: "————"

The view that the one with experience should read it and the view that one without experience should read it ran counter to each other.

Both sides were logical, and it was difficult to conceive either side as wrong. However, what made him curious then was——

Subaru: “Then, what about me, who’s already lost memories once? If the condition for losing memories is to accumulate information from Books of the Dead, have I been reset? Or not?”

Ram: “That is quite a grave issue. If Barusu’s memories are lost again, and everything has to be explained again… even the thought of it makes one shudder.”

Subaru: “Your language made me shudder too!”

Emilia: “Mhm… I’m also reaaally worried, about that. I don’t want Subaru to forget all sorts of things, again.”

Emilia and Ram affirmed the concern Subaru wielded in their own ways.

In all honesty, the questions had no end to them. It was unknown whether reading a large number of people made them disappear, or if a smaller number of people was dangerous.

He could not say it openly, but Subaru also possessed the memories of reading Meili’s Book of the Dead in the previous loop. Would that count as having read one Book this time as well?

Meili: “Whaaat~? Does that look in your eyes say that you’re thinking of just making me read as expiation, ehhh? That huuurt~.”

Subaru: “There’s no way. If you say stupid stuff, you’ll be grounded.”

Meili: “It’s abuuuse. Isn’t the way you treat prisoners even more mean than back when we were in the mansion, huuuh~.”

Subaru scolded Meili in response to her ill-humored joke, which had been remarked upon accepting his gaze. Subsequently, Meili pouted her cheeks, grabbed Shaula and Emilia’s hands, and hid behind them.

Though quite self-interested, that was how cute children ought to be. Subaru smiled wryly before Meili’s attitude, and then turned back towards Echidna.

Subaru: “So, do you have any other ideas?”

“Anastasia”: “Let us see. Whether we, who have the leeway of a single Book more than Julius, are to read it, or if Julius, who has already experienced it, is to read it, or if Natsuki-kun, whose memories may have overflown once already, is to read it…”

Subaru: “Can I make a comment really convenient to me? ——I think it’s best if I read it.”

Beatrice: “Subaru…”

Echidna brought up the list of candidates, and Beatrice grasped Subaru’s hand when he responded. Subaru winked whilst looking into her gaze, tinted with a deeper color of concern than one of unease.

Beatrice: “This is no time for bad jokes, in fact. His own memories, Subaru will…”

Subaru: “No, I don’t want to lose my memories, of course. But this is the appropriate call in terms of risk management. No matter how you look at it, I’m the person with the least possibility of putting everyone in danger by losing memories. I’m the weakest one out of all of us, after all.”

Well, he did want to say he was not weaker than at least Meili, but it was a well-known fact that he could not win against any of the others.

He would be easy to subdue, and since he had already lost memories once, the way to cope with it would also be simple.

The issue was, Subaru had already accumulated memories of four laps which must not be forgotten. That is why——

Subaru: “I’m not throwing down the gauntlet with the intention to forget. But, we are a team. Everyone needs to bear some sort of responsibility for the sake of everyone.”

Beatrice: “————”

Subaru: “Julius is charged with fighting, Echidna is charged with intellect, Ram is charged with having a wicked tongue, Meili is charged with being cute, Beatrice is charged with being cute, Emilia-chan is

charged with being the beautiful *isamufu*[191], Shaula is charged with *tsuyakashii bamen*[192], if you think about it that way, then I should be the one charged with this."

Beatrice: "For some reason, it feels like there are way too many pointless positions…"

Shaula: "Not at all! When the plot takes a turn for the worse, romantic scenes are important! If it's for art and Master-sama, then I'll take off my clothes[193]!"

Subaru: "No, if you take any more clothes off I'll pull out, so you don't have to do your best."

Shaula: "The ladder slipped!"

Everyone here knew, that this was Subaru's way of comforting them. In response to Subaru's speech and conduct whilst he presumed upon that, the first one to sigh was Beatrice, who still had his hand gripped.

She took a deep inhale and then turned her eyes towards Subaru.

Beatrice: "Geez, if things take this sort of a turn, then Subaru will never budge no matter what, I suppose. That part of you hasn't changed even after losing memories, in fact. That's already a well-known fact seeing what happened with Meili, I suppose."

Subaru: "Ehhh, but you love me with all my qualities, right? I'll blush."

Beatrice: "Don't get cocky, in fact!"

He spanked the blushing Beatrice around her hips.

However, her words did not possess the nuance of denial. And it seems the same went for the rest of the members as well.

Ram: "You are getting mashed if you forget your promise with Ram."

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[191] Engrish flip. Means "brave woman/heroine" (勇婦), originally "ヒロイン" (heroine).

[192] Engrish flip. Means "captivating scene(s)" (艶かしい場面), originally "グラビアシーン" (gravure scenes, in the sense of beautiful or attractive scenes).

[193] This may be a joke related to Subaru's Engrish. The word he uses is "グラビア", for "gravure", which incidentally is also used in an expression that refers to bikini models/pin-up girls, "グラビアアイドル".

Subaru: “What’s that, right when I was having such a nice monologue!?”

Ram: “What indeed.”

Snorting her nose, Ram then turned the book she held in her arms to Subaru.

Profoundly tasting the heavy sensation of the book with his arms, Subaru smiled bitterly.

Emilia: “Even if we tell you to not be reckless, Subaru will still be reckless, isn’t that so… I think that part of you is reaaally unfair. I’m always worried.”

Subaru: “I have nothing to say but apologize for that. But, just as how much Emilia-chan is worried, I’m worried about you the same amount… What do you think. Would that be presumptuous?”

Emilia: “It makes me happy that Subaru would think that way. That’s why, I feel reaaally convoluted. Come back no matter what… even if we make a promise like that, Subaru will break it anyway, so I won’t make that promise.”

Subaru: “The fact that the me until yesterday couldn’t be trusted this much instead gets my heart throbbing. I wonder what the hell did he do.”

Shrugging his shoulders upon Emilia’s pleasant words, Subaru asked “Am I right?” to those surrounding them. And upon that, he noticed everyone but Shaula and Meili had all averted their eyes away.

Regardless of Beatrice and Ram, who were in the same Camp as him, it seemed that Subaru’s breaking of promises had reached even Julius and Echidna.

Regardless——

Subaru: “I’ll read it, no objections, right?”

“Anastasia”: “…In the end, I am unable to come up with any inference or suspicion. Though if possible, I wanted to opt for eyes which would be the least endangered out of everyone here.”

Echidna apologetically lowered her eyebrows before Subaru, who was lightly holding the Book.

What she had remarked was true, and the fact that she had been concerned for everyone was unquestionable. That was why, Subaru was able to respond earnestly to her saying “Don’t let it bother you”.

Subaru: “Well, for now, I’ll dive into it. If I lose my memories, then put me down with ice and explain everything to me gently.”

Beatrice: “Nobody’s going to perform such a violent act, in fact…”

Subaru: “I know. Because you’re kind.”

Caressing the perturbed Beatrice on her head, he gently pressed her wide forehead. Beatrice pouted with a discontent expression, and took a single step backward.

And, with everyone’s gazes focusing on him, Subaru sat down on the spot, crossed his legs, and took an immensely deep inhale.

——Atop his knees, Reid Astrea’s Book of the Dead.

Subaru: “————”

Upon concentrating on it, there definitely was a certain ominousness emanating from the book.

A similar sensation had also existed back when he read Meili’s, her Book of the Dead, but the sense of intimidation this Book had was far greater. Perhaps what the reader could feel changed depending on whose Book was taken—— Just what kind of a life, would he be made to read, he pondered.

And, would Subaru’s memories be able to withstand it?

Subaru: “————”

Putting his hand on the front cover of the Book, Subaru, for merely once, looked towards everyone who was watching over him.

Beatrice, Meili, Ram, Echidna, Julius, Shaula, were observing him. And——

Emilia: “——Subaru.”

Subaru: “Well then, I’ll be leaving. I may get late coming back, so you can go ahead and have dinner.”

Emilia: “…Stupid.”

Seen off by that smile of Emilia’s, Subaru turned the front cover of the Book of the Dead over.

Upon that instant, the characters written on the book glowed, and Subaru was made to undergo a hallucination as though information was being smitten into his brain via his eyeballs.

And in but a moment, his consciousness was taken in towards the book——

——His consciousness, was detached from the Library, and propelled towards darkness.

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——What he had felt when he read Meili’s Book of the Dead, had become quite amorphous now.

The spectacles he had witnessed, the life she had walked, the paths she had trodden were distinct in their own ways.

However, his memories were of witnessing those spectacles; tangibly speaking, of becoming one with the one whose name was the title of the Book of the Dead, and being made to personally experience those subjective thoughts, sights.

To summarize, the journey of treading through the content of the Book of the Dead, was to assimilate into that person.

In those moments, the Natsuki Subaru witnessing the contents of the Book had been Meili Portroute.

That was precisely why, it could be believed that queer self-consciousness which bore the presence of Meili, as “*Me*”, had constantly shadowed Subaru’s consciousness from close vicinity.

If that was the potency of the Book of the Dead, then right now, what Subaru was supposed to be laying his eyes on was the life of Reid Astrea, his subjective world within his incomprehensible thinking.

What he thought, what he liked, what he disliked, what he loved, what he despised, what he achieved.

He was supposed to become one with the philosophy of Reid Astrea, and be shown his life.

Thus, Subaru noticed the abnormality at once.

——The place where he was, right now, definitely was not that past of Reid Astrea's.

Subaru: "…Ah?"

He stood in a white, white location.

His environs, unduly spacious, white, ambiguous space of no visible end stretched across, and without knowing where his self was, Subaru was exhausted of reason.

He could see his hands. He could see his legs. Upon turning his neck, his torso and hips were also there.

In other words, Subaru's body was here. This did not coincide with the phenomena that had occurred in Meili's Book of the Dead. Unable to concur, he was thrown into an unnatural circumstance.

From what he could see, Subaru's attire was the same as when he had decided to read the Book of the Dead.

Whether that was due to Subaru recognizing that he would look like this in this "present condition", or the will of something else, like the work of the Library's will, hence reconstructing Subaru in that form.

He did not want to consider that the moment he read the Book, his entire body had gotten captured within——

???: "——Well well? Oh, onii-san, you've come here again?"

Subaru: "——Hk."

Suddenly, Subaru's shoulders sprang up upon hearing a voice which was not his own, but that of another.

The voice came from behind, Subaru spontaneously jumped ahead and subsequently turned around, drawing a circle, remaining vigilant. In response to Subaru's spasmodic conduct, the personage behind rounded its eyes.

Subaru: "——Who are you?"

Looking at that person, Subaru whispered openly, with perplexity and bafflement.

That was his encounter with someone, completely unexpected and unknown to Subaru.

The one standing there, was a young girl Subaru had never seen before.

Pale toned, with hair lengthy, truly lengthy, like transparent gold threads. They spanned across the white floor, submerging underfoot her standing self like a sea of golden.

Large, round, blue eyes, limbs like transparent porcelain. On the other hand, she wore unshapely clothes on her body, seemingly crude, pale cloths attached together, hurting her beautiful impression.

Subaru: "————"

A young girl he had never seen before. That was how it was supposed to be.

However, before that young girl's form, Subaru narrowed his eyes and rubbed his eyelids with the back of his hand. A gesture to seemingly recover the field of vision from haze, but her visible form did not change.

Even after looking at her yet again, she remained a young girl whom he was unacquainted with—— He felt his memories, throb faintly.

???: "Did you calm down a bit, onii-san?"

Subaru: "What's this place… No, who are you? Which one should I ask first?"

???: "How covetous, onii-san. But, the quality of vomiting out the honest emotion of wanting to ask both is certainly not bad. We, love covetous people, you see."

Saying so, in response to the baffled Subaru, the young girl cleaved her lips sideways and smiled.

Yes, she smiled, and that was the only befitting expression for describing that smile.

The young girl was thirteen to fourteen years of age, yet gave the impression of being even younger.

Coupled with her well-featured physical appearance, unquestionably, a smile would suit the young girl, and yet.

In Subaru's eyes, her smile, seemed ominous.

His instincts conjectured, as though, the soul of this young girl, had belittled a great number of lives.

And whilst Subaru shuddered, before him, the young girl reported.

???: "This place is, lonesome white, the final destination of the soul. The cradle of Od Lagna—— The Hall of Memories."

Subaru: "Hall of, Memories…?"

???: "Yes, yes, the Hall of Memories. And——"

Subaru widened his eyes upon hearing the term unheard of.

While making a satisfied expression upon seeing Subaru's reaction, the young girl, spoke.

While smiling, the malice which had taken the shape of a young girl, vocalized.

Louis: "——We are, a Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, representing Gluttony, Louis Arneb."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Pretty sure it'll be for a short while again, but please be caring, onii-san."

「ここは、寂しく白い、魂の終着地点。
オド・ラグナの揺り籠。――記憶の回廊」
『記憶の、回廊……？』
「そうそう、記憶の回廊。そして――」
少女の形をした、悪意が、嗤いながら、言った。
「――あたしたちは、魔女教大罪司教、
『暴食』担当、ルイ・アルネブ」
『――』
「どうせまた、短い間だけど、よろしくね、お兄さん」

Arc 6 Chapter 60 – A Single Spot of Sunshine

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 3 "——Stand Up", Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——The Hall of Memories and Louis Arneb.

Subaru: "————"

Yes, in front of the yellow-haired young girl who had responded to his query, Subaru remained silent.

Within the unanticipated space of white, a happenstance meeting with an unanticipated young girl. And, the know-it-all expression of the young girl set up an ambience as though she would be willing to talk about a multitude of things——

Subaru: "…First of all, Witch Cult or Gluttony, Sin Archbishop, what the hell do they even mean?"

Louis: "Awaaa."

At Subaru's remark, whilst he folded his arms and tilted his head, Louis put her hand on her mouth and smiled widely.

If that moment alone were to be excluded, the solitary girl standing still within the illusion-like spectacle of sheer white was a location capable of being an artwork masterpiece, but the alarm of Subaru's instincts had been turbulently ringing since earlier.

Subaru's survival instincts were highly likely to be of no avail, as a result of being brought up in tranquil modern-day Japan. The reason why they were excited, was a matter of course due to the heterogeneous aura of this young girl.

Along with that, this was the result of having been visited by unforeseen circumstances, so it was halfway something which could not have been helped, but—— pertaining to this existence wielding such know-it-all airs, the knowledge Subaru was endowed with was seemingly insufficient.

It was also the case with what she had said just now, Witch Cult, Sin Archbishop, Hall of Memories and what-not. Perchance, it may have been ordinary knowledge in this world, but unfortunately Subaru possessed no change of such ordinary general knowledge in his hand.

Consequently, he found launching a progressive question to be difficult as well——

Louis: "——The Witch Cult, you see, is basically a gathering of people loathed by this world."

Subaru: "Oh?"

Louis: "Even onii-san must have at least heard the name Witch of Envy, no? The Witch Cult, has a deep connection with that Witch-sama… weeell~, you can think of it as something like followers."

Subaru: "…Then, what you said just now, refers to Sin Archbishop, huh."

"Sin" and "Archbishop", had quite a strong ambience of running counter to each other as a combination, but was a naming which suited Subaru's sense down to a tee.

For upon hearing it even once,

Subaru: "It can be understood it's the name of a villain."

Louis: "Oh no, well no, ah no, as it's no, we're telling you no, even though it's no, you knooow~."

Horizontally shaking her head in refusal, Louis embraced her own petite body in Subaru's line of sight. With no signs of the smile fading away from those lips, her refusal was merely in appearance as well.

It was a young girl with her true feelings beyond perception—— No, perhaps it should be said they were vague, with no point to grip on.

Louis: "Don't tease a tender young girl with such words, onii-san. Even we get hurt, you know? Because we are the owner of a heart more fragile and easier to hurt than all others."

Subaru: “Not convincing at all. Also, the way you use your first-person pronoun, is it because it’s stuck to your character? Or is it a cool appeal like a one-man army. «We» or «us», it’s not stable, you know[194].”

Louis: “Ahhh~… you don’t have to worry about that. It’s just that, there are too many selves, so it’s getting airy as to which one is to be the subject, that’s all. At this point, we’re actually getting sick of it, you know.”

Whilst saying so, Louis lightly oriented her gaze downwards, continuing her words saying “But”.

Louis: “It can’t be helped, can it. They are gifts from onii-chan and nii-sama after all, they must be accepted earnestly or it’ll be disqualification as a little sister. We’re siblings so we must help each other out and cooperate, you know.”

Subaru: “…Well, you’re an adorable little sister, considerate of your elder brothers. I was the only child so I’m jealous.”

Louis: “Is that so, eh? Onii-san may have also gotten a little brother or little sister about now, no?”

Subaru: “Could you stop saying terrifying stuff!? I don’t want to imagine that!?”

Regardless, his parents were an intimate married couple, so something like that actually meant no jest.

If it was that father and mother of his, they would have another child upon Subaru’s disappearance—— No, inconceivable.

Subaru: “————”

Should Subaru disappear, they would continue searching until they find him, that was how Subaru’s parents were.

What must have his mother thought of her son, who had not even said any greetings when leaving. What must have his father felt, upon getting to know about that.

[194] All the Gluttonies use a plural form of a pronoun to refer to themselves. Louis alternates between “私たち” (watashitachi) and “あたしたち” (atashitachi), which are just the pronouns “私” (watashi) and “あたし” (atashi) with the plural expression, “たち” (tachi), appended at the end. Ley and Roy alternate between both “俺たち” (oretachi) and “僕たち” (bokutachi), derived from the base pronoun “俺” (ore) and “僕” (boku), therefore following this convention as well.

He wished that Subaru's summoning into the different world was a reincarnation, was what his belief was.

Must he make his parents taste the agony of searching for their disappeared son, then Subaru wished to relay that he had come to the different world after dying. That was much more comfortable. It had much more, salvation.

That was why——

Louis: "——We understand, onii-san."

Subaru: "——Hk! Don't joke around!"

He felt indignant at Louis, who was peering at Subaru from below, carrying the hair which buried the floor in both of her arms.

It was not as if she had spoken of his current uneasiness. It was merely that having his bitter expression observed, he had been told as if she understood Subaru's sentiments.

Finding that to be terribly infuriating, Subaru shouted at Louis, and turned his back towards her.

Subaru: "As if you know anything about me! Saying things as you plea…"

Louis: "——You're inexcusably apologetic towards Dad, and Mom, aren't you? Without having said a single word of farewell, you're regretting how disobedient of a son you were. No, you were always regretting. Both now and earlier, isn't it?"

Subaru: "————"

Yes, with the purport of being aware, whilst continuing the remarks of one showing to be a sympathizer, Louis softly hugged Subaru's back.

A small, petite frame. Subaru halted his breath and stiffened his body.

Not because of having been nestled close to by the young girl. Because of the very content of the young girl's words.

Those comments of one showing to be a sympathizer, had unmistakably, however, guessed the end of Subaru's heart correctly.

Louis: "Why do we understand, you say? Isn't it obvious we'd understand? Because there's not a single person who knows about onii-san as much as we or us do, after all."

Subaru: "——Don't touch me!"

Louis: "Ah."

Louis harbored a sour look on her lips at Subaru, who swung his arms, raised his breath, and took distance.

What the hell. Do females of unknown character in this world have no hesitation at all in having physical contact with unfamiliar men? Too over-familiar.

It was frightening to possibly abandon the heart weakened by the warmth of that body.

Subaru: "What's the deal with you! What do you want to say!"

Louis: "We just want onii-san to be relieved, we're telling you. It's alright, it's alright. There's a proooper~ full-stop, on your feelings for Dad and Mom. Even if it may be one-sided, it's with the intention of facing them. Your heart got relaxed, we're telling you. Pretense, you see."

Subaru: "————"

Whilst deriding, Louis had the nails of her right hand stab into her left arm. With the note of scratching, with vigor one would flinch from pain by simply witnessing, she began wounding that thin, white arm.

At Subaru, who knitted his eyebrows upon that deed, Louis unraveled her frighteningly scarlet, long tongue,

Louis: "Pretense, is completely healthy. It makes it look as if there are no problems within one's heart at all. You're skilled at it, onii-san, aren't you. It's sad that you're skilled at it, onii-san, isn't it."

Subaru distorted his lips, at the speech which seemingly terribly abraded the interior of his chest.

Now on he must abide by the alarm bell of his instinct, which's way of ringing may undergo change, should he go along with her furthermore.

Subaru: "I don't get what you want to say. I don't get it, but it'll become an injury so stop. Well then, let's play the catch of conversation. No fastballs allowed. Let's keep in mind to only throw curveballs."

Louis: "Mutually?"

Subaru: "Mutually. Yeah, for example… Let's continue the conversation about Sin Archbishops, from earlier."

Without staying on board with Louis's way, Subaru returned the topic to what it was just recently.

If he got to know that "Sin Archbishop" meant "Sin Archbishop" literally, then he had some knowledge of the associativity between the words "Sin" and "Gluttony".

Subaru: "If you're Gluttony, then there must be six other similar people, no?"

Louis: "If onii-chan and nii-sama were also to be included, then that would make exactly six, we guess? Ah, but, it got reduced by two people recently so there may be four people now. If only those two could just die quickly as well, you know."

Subaru: "…If that's what you say, then your sense of comradeship seems to be pretty low."

Louis: "It's obvious, you know. We may name ourselves as something like Sin Archbishops, but we're just a gathering of people loathed by this world anyway. Just the way of calling us is different, but we're the same as the Witch after all."

Saying so, Louis flopped and knelt down at that spot. When she did that, she appeared as having her self sunken within hair of gold threads, an extremely peculiar ambience.

Subaru scratched his head, settling his hips onto a position making sure as to her hair did not get crushed underneath, and tilted his head saying "Witch?".

Subaru: "Same as the Witch you say, you mean same as the Witch which seems to be believed as being excessively frightening?"

Louis: “As one would expect, the nature of the Witch of Envy is worse than even us, so we don’t want to be lumped together, you know. The rest is the same. Witch and Sin Archbishop both, are the same thing, just called differently. The good-for-nothings compatible with the Witch Factors, are just called differently due to different eras and positions, that’s all.”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “Weeell~, the present onii-san has forgotten about Witches and Sin Archbishops, and us anyways, so whichever one may be fine, you know. We get it, we do get it, we get it you know, as we get it, but we got it, because we got it, because we had gotten it…”

Subaru: “Shut up.”

Louis: “Ah.”

Mouthing off, intercepting the words assailing upon him like a wave, Subaru put his hand on his chin.

Somehow or the other, it also felt like he was getting to hear things which were quite important. Though it was a speech Subaru could not make a single pinpoint at, it seemed he could remain without getting into the awkward situation of returning to Emilia and the rest without reaping any harvest.

However, Subaru pondering here was not due to the existence or nonexistence of that achievement.

Subaru was pondering here due to the unease he felt from Louis’s responses, which could be avoided no more—— No, it was a sensation which ought to be labelled as one he was already familiar with.

With that as the reason, if there was anything that struck his mind——

Subaru: “Could it be, you’re a lineage of gods?”

Louis: “Lineage of gods, you say… Ah, is it this? Something like, reincarnation into different worlds? Don’t really get it, but we and that are unrelated. Certainly, this is a place which can feel weird, though.”

Chuckling and mocking, with her yellow hair underneath her buttocks, Louis turned her body around once at that very spot, and denoted the white world possessing nothing with her lightly fluttering hair.

Louis: “This is, a place just as how it appears. A place where eeeverything~ disappears, hence, a place with nothing. We’re standing here all alone, that’s why we may seem like the guardian deity of this place, isn’t that so?”

Subaru: “The cradle of Od Lagna, was it? Including the name «Hall of Memories» as well, none of it got into my head whatsoever.”

Louis: “Hm, hm, hm, hmm~, guess so… Basically, this is the place where souls are filtered.”

Subaru: “Souls, filtered?”

At the phraseology difficult to be accustomed to, Subaru had question marks float within his mind.

“Filtering”, in other words, had the same implication as saying “sieving”, but it was rare to hear it being utilized with regard to souls.

However, Louis, with a happy expression, pulled her knees towards herself and said “Yes, yes”.

Louis: “You use a dust cloth which had been used before once again after washing and drying it, no? The same goes for souls. By clearing the dirt stuck onto it, it’s used once more when in a clear state again.”

Subaru: “That, dirt stuck onto it… Does it mean memories or experiences and stuff?”

Louis: “If that’s what you can understand, then let’s keep it that way, alright? Onii-san, do as how you’d like.”

Distorting his cheeks at Louis, who had her tongue out, Subaru turned his head around towards the environs.

As ever, in the white space—— in the Hall of Memories, existed nothing novel to the eyes. Within the endless white world, any easy-to-understand exhibit was not present either.

For argument’s sake, if this place was indeed how Louis spoke of it, then there could have been levitating disembodied souls, or the filtered memories or experiences rendered visible in some form.

Louis: “It’s not something so easy-to-comprehend, you know.”

Subaru: “That God called Od Lagna is pretty malicious, isn’t it?”

Louis: “It’s not an article so great as to be called God, that thing. That thing has nothing like such splendid ideology, after all. It’s just a mechanism, you know. A mechanism for keeping the world from breaking is what it is.”

Subaru: “A mechanism…”

Louis: “Whether Witch Factors, or Divine Protections, or Sword Saints, or Witches, it considers nothing, you know. If there’s something nice about Od Lagna, it’s just that it’s uninterested, equal, impartial, and favors nothing.”

Narrowing her eyes with seeming disinterest, Louis interposed her own face in the space between her knees which she had pulled towards herself. Sidelong glancing at her, who had her cheeks curved by her white kneecaps, Subaru took a short inhale.

She was a young girl who had continued conversing quite obediently till now. He could reckon that perhaps, she had not spoken any seemingly false lies either. That was precisely why, Subaru inhaled.

Inhaling, exhaling, inhaling once more, and then, he looked at her.

And, asked her.

Subaru: “——The one to steal my memories of everything until yesterday, is it you?”

Louis: “Yeah, so?”

The offender responded to Subaru’s question, exceedingly promptly.

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Subaru: “————”

With his doubt readily responded to, Subaru closed his eyes.

He felt that he would not be denied much. She must have done something like that, that was why she had judged so much about him with the dialogue they'd had in this scant time, was how he felt.

Louis, knew far too much. She was deeply, far too *au fait* with the emotions of Subaru's heart.

Also including precisely that which the present Natsuki Subaru could never be aware of, Louis Arneb was thoroughly informed regarding "Natsuki Subaru".

It was not something which could be falsely classified with words, such as it being a type of observation seldom seen, and so that was precisely why Subaru had gone ahead and enquired with complete honesty, and attained its affirmation.

Mysteriously, what was welling up in his chest was not rage, but understanding. In other words——

Subaru: "So the me of yesterday, did indeed come here as well, huh."

Louis: "Speaking strictly, the way of arrival was a bit different, you see. But weeell~, the purpose was the same. The result was slightly different, that's all. But, how amazing. How wonderful. After how many times, did you manage to come here?"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Hey, answer, onii-san. We answered, you know—— After having gotten eaten by us, what count of onii-san are you, onii-san?"

Upon that question of Louis's, chills ran through the muscles around Subaru's spine.

Her eyes, questions, were clearly in vein of one aware of the conviction of Return by Death.

No, it was a matter of course. It was but a matter of course.

If she had stolen the Memories of "Natsuki Subaru", and had the ability to freely read those Memories, then there was nothing odd about her knowing of Return by Death.

Return by Death, was not a power wielded only by the Subaru who had lost his Memories, but must have unquestionably been the power which "Natsuki Subaru" had wielded prior to losing his Memories.

Certainly, "Natsuki Subaru" had made free use of that power, and sailed across a great number of difficult situations. The result of that was the trust he gained from Emilia, Beatrice, his comrades, the testimony of cheat = foul as it were.

Subaru did not intend to find faults in that. Whether it be cheating or foul play, if in a setting where someone's life was on the line, there must not be any hesitation in utilizing it. The choice "Natsuki Subaru" had made was correct. That was why, Subaru must do the same now, in "Natsuki Subaru's" absence.

And, accepting there being worth in its application, he gulped down the power of Return by Death.

However, contrary to that resolve, there existed a queer uneasiness, anxiety, in the interior of Subaru's chest.

Louis Arneb was infringing upon that difficult to repel fear, that taboo. That was——

Louis: "——About how nobody must get to know? If it's about that, then it's already too late, onii-san. Us meeting onii-san happened yesterday, no?"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "The «*kimari*»[195] about how nobody must get to know, has already been broken a long time back. But, happenings of the Hall of Memories don't leak outside easily. That's why the scary, scary Witch won't make a move."

Quickly, with her limbs set on the floor, Louis drew her face closer to Subaru, who was sitting cross-legged. She expressed a bewitching smile unsuited to her age, whilst having her scarlet tongue peek out,

Louis: "Hey, onii-san. Which time is this?"

At that tone of voice which seemed as if her tongue was directly pecking at his brain, Subaru tasted a numbing pain.

And then, having his tongue and throat tremble faintly,

[195] Engrish flip. Means "rule" (決まり), originally "ルール" (rule).

Subaru: "…It's, the fifth time."

Louis: "——Hk! Amazing, how amazing, so amazing, it's amazing, isn't it amazing, we're telling you it's amazing, because it's amazing, because it is amazing that we admire and yearn for it… Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!"

Subaru: "Gah, hk!"

Louis: "We irresistibly want to taste onii-san so much, that our stomach would be filled to bursting! From our experiences, we think appetite and sexual desire are similar. Sexual desire in other words is love, right? In other words, onii-san, we——"

Thrusting Subaru away, Louis, who was in the position of riding a horseback, breathed out warm sighs with an aroused face. With blood rushing to her cheeks and eyes spellbound, Louis had her tongue crawl on Subaru's neck lacking any hesitation.

At the same pace, the words she tried to continue on to, his thoughts finally caught up to what they would be——

Louis: "——Love you."

His heart exploded, reminded of the words of love that had fusilladed upon Subaru countless times in the previous loop, wherein he had desired "Death" under circumstances which took a hopeless turn.

Subaru: "——Let's see, you tiny damn sexologist!"

Louis: "——Uhi."

Opening his eyes, Subaru seized the nape of the young girl who was pressing him down, and at the same pace, violently, coercively, pushed her down onto the white floor. Exchanging their stances, this time it was Subaru in the position of riding a horseback atop her.

A slender, light figure. The long yellow hair stretching out on the floor, like a golden bed she was lying sprawled upon, whilst Subaru kept a check on her neck and bared his canines, seemingly in a position of having pinned her down.

Subaru: “Did you, let your guard down? How unfortunate! In this position, I have an overwhelming advantage! If you don’t want to get your neck strangled like this, my Memories are to be…”

Louis: “Returned, you say? You’ll strangle the neck if they’re not returned? Our neck, a feeble little girl’s?”

With her neck arrested, in the state of having gotten the right over her life and death seized, Louis gazed at Subaru, who was breathing roughly through his nose, and loosened her lips with the earlier excitement in her eyes not dimmed in the slightest.

And, from her loosened lips, she asked with an imitative voice which felt as if it were a curse.

Louis: “Is onii-san, really going to do something like that?”

Subaru: “——Do you think, I can’t?”

Louis: “Not really think, we actually know, isn’t it right? After all, look, it’s such that the current us know more about onii-san than onii-san himself anyway.”

Whilst saying so, Louis repeatedly nudged her cheeks with the index fingers of both her hands, and tilted her head as if provoking. Holding his breath at that attitude of hers, Subaru looked down onto his right hand which had grasped Louis’s neck.

Should Subaru wish to show his seriousness a bit, all he had to do was to pour strength into his arm.

Should he show his seriousness, Louis would certainly reconsider her ideas as well.

Were he to be asked whether he would kill her, that would certainly be difficult. Arduous.

Even for a just cause, like being a suicide assistant, Subaru had been unable to smash consciousness out of his comrade’s mind with a piece of rubble.

So even if he knew it was an enemy of his, powerfully strangling the neck of the young girl before his eyes was what he should do.

No, at least strangling he was capable of. It was a necessity.

He called back to Emilia, Beatrice, Ram, Meili, Julius, Echidna, Shaula, Patrasche, everyone in his mind, and. And——

Louis: "——Strength has faded away from your arms, hasn't it, onii-san."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "We really had no intention of resisting, you know? After all, over here we are just as how it seems or a weak young girl. Unlike onii-chan or nii-sama, we must take the form of eaten people or we can't haul out any powers, isn't that so."

With the finger that had been nudging her own cheek, Louis nudged Subaru's right hand which was gripping to Louis's neck. With that frail strength, Subaru's palm let go of her neck far too swiftly.

Subaru: "Shit… Hk!"

Louis: "Don't feel down anymore, onii-san. It was a good performance, a good performance. After all, to be honest… it's such that we didn't even think that onii-san would come back here."

Subaru: "Do you think that's any good consolation?"

Continuing to remain in the pushed down stance, Louis, who was lying sprawled on the floor, made an expression suggesting that the worst had already passed. Destroying that expression, he searched for words in order to convey his demands, but was unable to find anything precise.

That was why, looking at Subaru, who ended up making an utterance like that of a poor loser, Louis raised her voice with an "Ahaha", similar to observing fish swimming inside an aquarium,

Louis: "But weeell~, it turned out nicely, didn't it. If something like the Memories of «Natsuki Subaru» are regained, the current onii-san will end up dying; that's what it'd mean anyway, so stay without doing something idiotic like committing suicide, you know."

Subaru: "…Ah?"

Louis: "Huh, what's with that weird reaction? It can't be, didn't you notice? If Memories return, the current self will get overwritten, and its existence will get terminated… That's the same as dying, no?"

——Subaru was petrified at that attitude of Louis's, as if she were asked the solution to an obvious riddle.

He would die. He would disappear, vanish. So had he been distinctly told.

So he had been told, that upon the return of the Memories of "Natsuki Subaru", the consciousness, the memories of the Subaru present right here, right now, would get overwritten, and disappear, vanish.

Should that not be named as "Death", what else should it be——

Louis: "——Right now, «Natsuki Subaru» is dead, isn't he? He's nowhere, after all. But, if «Natsuki Subaru» comes back, this time it'll be onii-san who will die, isn't it. He won't be able to go anywhere, after all."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Umm, you knooow~, does «Natsuki Subaru» really have the worth to go so far for and be recovered, eh? Onii-san must also be capable of doing the same things, no? Onii-san must've also come to love the people around him in the same way, isn't that right. The people around too will also come to love onii-san the saaame~ way—— What's so wrong with that?"

Subaru: "What's…"

So wrong with that, should that be asked, then certainly there was nothing wrong with it.

Certainly, there was nothing wrong with either "Natsuki Subaru" or Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru was a human possessing numerous flaws. Filled with flaws such that he would be repulsed by himself. Should he be asked whom he hated the most in this world, he would answer it was himself with nary an instant's worth of faltering.

That was how hopeless, insufficient, Natsuki Subaru was.

However, there present were no errs in Subaru pertaining to this particular question.

——What was present was merely the hopeless truth, a single spot of sunshine.

Subaru: "To Emilia-chan and the others, I…"

Wanted to return "Natsuki Subaru".

Henceforth, he intended to prepare resolve within himself that should he find a chance to recover Memories, he would take it without any hesitation.

However, he had completely averted his eyes away from the disappearance of his own existence.

Speaking of sheer conveniences, the two memories blending together, or some part of "Natsuki Subaru" being left within the current Subaru, he had thought if something like that could not happen, he had wondered if it could all not be settled in a nice shape of some sort. He had expected the occurrence of a miracle of this kind.

Subaru's such vacillating expectations were——

Louis: "What would it be like? Never seen a person who had their Memories returned before, so we have no idea."

Louis unveiled her teeth, as though ridiculing Subaru's conflict, with the expression in her eyes being that of a cat tormenting a mouse.

The offender who had heisted these Memories, even irresponsibly, was pleased to say that she knew nothing of what would happen thereafter. That was not a lie, but certainly the truth.

Louis Arneb would never do something such as returning what she had stolen away to the original owner.

Consequently, she truly held no idea what would happen to Natsuki Subaru as a consequence of having the Memories returned.

Louis: "Onii-san, you got this life by being born and everything, it won't do if you don't celebrate it."

That irresponsible usurper, continued to gaze intently at Subaru's face from an inch worth distance.

Louis: "As a result of us eating the Memories of «Natsuki Subaru», onii-san is here. In other words, we are something like onii-san's birth parent, isn't that right. To try and choose the option of having yourself die in front of that parent, isn't that what's called lack of filial piety, onii-san."

Subaru: "Something so, absurd is… Hk."

Louis: "——Memories are what shape people, onii-san."

Subaru: “————”

Becoming deeper, becoming colder, Louis erased all expression and said only those brief words with a serious tone.

Without thinking, Subaru inhaled at the acuity of those words, and quietened.

Alongside, he also felt that this had not been the first time he had heard those words. If not mistaken, then that resonance, those words, immediately before facing the second “Death” as well had been——

Louis: “The present onii-san, has relationships which the present onii-san has created. Why don’t you try living again anew, facing forward. We think that’s also an option, you know.”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “On top of that, don’t know how we should feel saying this but… «Natsuki Subaru», didn’t really feel like the image of an ideal man, you know?”

Closing one of her eyes, Louis struck the emotions of Subaru’s heart with an expression as if finding what she was going to say to be difficult.

All the more, she linked her arms in front of her chest while remaining in the stance of being a horseback ridden on by Subaru, and gazed into his dark pupils with eyes like that of a dreaming maiden——

Louis: “Pitiable Emilia! A miserable girl who is avoided by everyone, just because of having her birth being the same as the former Witch! Ah, how kind must my self be, to still remain by her side!”

Subaru: “Wha…”

Louis: “Weak, fragile Beatrice! Without anyone to rely on, a lonely girl who spent a time of solitude all by herself! My self must pull her hand through the dark and dangerous path!”

Before the staggered Subaru, what Louis sonorously continued articulating were the names of two young girls who had prayed for Subaru’s safety and shown him a path, and terribly elliptical mental images of them.

Even Subaru understood whose mental images they were, and what Louis intended to express.

Though he understood, that was.

Louis: “Devoted and seeking to dedicate gratuitous love, Rem! Foolish and beautiful, how pure. Surely she is an incomplete being who gains the true feeling of living by becoming frantic for the sake of someone else, other than herself. Precisely that, must be led by the existence known as I!”

Subaru: “What’re you… what’re you trying to do!?”

Louis: “Speaking for what «Natsuki Subaru» used to think, we’re telling you. Wanting a sense of superiority. Not thinking it was for the sake of someone else all the time, you know. Flocking only convenient people around, getting drunk on the pleasant feeling of offering a hand. Not even throwing any feed to a dog which won’t get emotionally attached. Keeping those away.”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “Do you really intend to hand yourself over, to that «Natsuki Subaru»?”

The question, having overlapped twice.

That was a requisition of confession for Natsuki Subaru, by Louis, by Gluttony.

To speak his true feelings, that was what Louis had demanded of Subaru.

Whether he did want to die, whether he did not want to die, if he, for the argument’s sake were to die, would it be for the sake of someone like that.

——No, Subaru’s death, would not be for the sake of “Natsuki Subaru”.

——No, from the very beginning, Subaru did not possess the intent to die. Even if he thought of returning “Natsuki Subaru” back to Emilia and the others, but for it to mean his own death?

——No, could he, however, truly trust “Natsuki Subaru”. At the very least, “Natsuki Subaru” had killed Meili, and had even carved incomprehensible characters on the wall.

Louis: “——Weeell~, what do you want to do, onii-san.”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

While saying so, Louis grasped Subaru's hands with her slender arms, and fastened them to her own neck.

Once again, though this time through her own incitement, Louis's slim neck lay vulnerable to Subaru's arms. Should he pour strength in both of his arms, it would surely fracture easily.

If not, the conclusion would be established.

However, to not do that meant either choosing to kill "Natsuki Subaru", or the same happening to himself—— at the very least, that was what Louis had been saying.

For argument's sake, for just argument's sake, if he broke this slim neck, and if "Natsuki Subaru" was to return and the present Subaru to disappear, would he not be able to witness even the fruits of his actions?

If that was the case, then what was the meaning of Subaru mustering up meager courage and undertaking action here?

Louis: "Weeell~."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "What? What will you do? What is it that you'll do? What are you going to do? What are you going to do, huh? What do you want to do? What do you want to do it like? Whatever you do it's alright you know? Whatever it ends up as we'll forgive you——"

As though tormenting him, as though ridiculing him, as though laying a curse upon him, Louis's words struck Subaru's eardrums.

So did Louis Arneb, so did Gluttony, so did the Sin Archbishop, so did the slim young girl, so did the abominable existence, so did his birth parent.

The choice of what he would do with "Natsuki Subaru", drew near Natsuki Subaru.

Louis: "Weeell~."

Well.

Louis: "——What do you want to do? Onii-san."

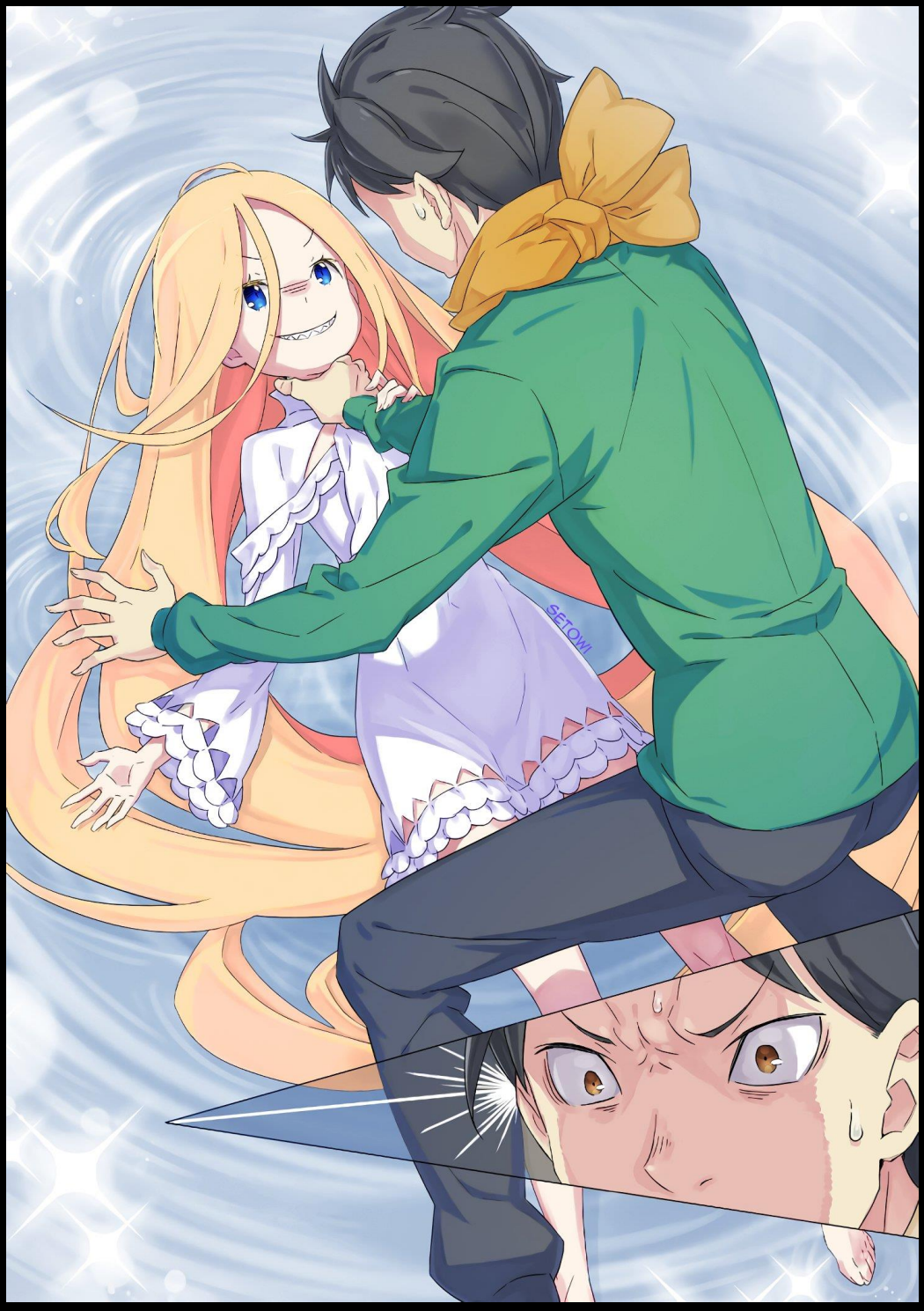

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Setowi (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 61 - ——Stand Up

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 3 "——Stand Up", Parts 3-5 & 7

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——A choice, that too a cruel one, was eating into Natsuki Subaru.

He heard the sound of something being abandoned and scorched away within the interior of his chest with a sizzling report, slowly and steadily.

That was his human nature, his emotion of trusting himself, his sentiments for "Natsuki Subaru", various entities of such kind, were being abandoned and scorched away.

With his hands on the young girl's throat, whilst being ridiculed by the young girl pushed down, Natsuki Subaru was made to stand in a setting of determining his own destiny, "Natsuki Subaru's" destiny.

Subaru: "————"

Heartbeats, inaudible. Though his breath was rough, his lungs were probably dysfunctional. A situation packed to the hilt to such an extent, yet not a single drop of cold sweat appeared on his forehead.

That was certainly because Natsuki Subaru's flesh body present here was not a part of reality.

By reading the book, he did not have his entire flesh body transferred, merely his mind had been hauled—— to make such considerations unfitting the situation, would also merely be a deed of evading reality.

And, by firing his considerations over to the other side, trying to secure transient peace was Subaru's heart.

However, neither time nor space nor his opponent would pardon this escape route of Subaru's.

Louis: “Weeell~, what’ll you do, onii-san.”

The young girl which had been pinned down by him, laughed sadistically and looked up at Subaru, petrified, having lost his way in the choice.

Whilst peeping into Subaru’s dark eyes, the young girl flickered her tongue in order to lick those eyeballs.

Louis: “Pinning down a feeble young girl, and placing your hands on that thin neck. Gets you shivering with thrill, no? Or perhaps instead, if it’s a predisposition like that of onii-san’s, such experiences become commonplace, isn’t that right?”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

Louis: “You’re trembling, so cute. In this state, will you be able to make such an important, important choice?”

Inclining her neck, Louis, facing upwards, kissed Subaru’s wrist. That shuddering gesture and the ardor pouring from her flirtatious glance, her inhumane words made Subaru recall a certain spectacle.

That was a callous spectacle Subaru had beheld upon once—— Provided that his way of having observed had been the reverse. Not something Subaru had witnessed from his own perspective, but the field of vision of a young girl who had gotten into a confrontation with Subaru.

The spectacle of Subaru pinning down, with a wicked countenance, and strangling the neck.

Exactly the same as the present situation, the spectacle of “Natsuki Subaru” strangling Meili to death——

Subaru: “Ugh.”

——The instant he realized this to be approximate to that spectacle, Subaru’s entire body, cheeks, tightened.

Louis: “——So after all, there really is an occasion which comes your mind?”

Subaru: “Non… Hk! Nonse…”

Louis: “We’re nooot~ speaking nonsense, you know. Instead, the one not being serious is onii-san, no? With more seriousness, earnestness, solemnity, you should love yourself.”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “Ahhh~, yes yes. Love yourself. See, love—— Similar to how the people onii-san wants to cherish hope for that, onii-san should also love himself, you know.”

With a superficial verbal tone, and words fitting identical description, a cosmetic wave of words was formed.

Did she intend to persuade him, or instead, was her faculty of sympathizing simply dead? Was this purposeful or was it simply her nature, was she jeering at him or was she consoling him?

It was vague. Louis Arneb’s way, was vague with regards to everything.

Vague, vague it was.

Louis’s words, her words were unsteady from the foundation, like leaves afloat the water’s surface devoid of stability. All of them of arbitrary nature, bent and distorted, if they preferably came to a clear disposition, then this indecision itself would surely be cleared up as well.

No, just how hazardous would it be to consider keeping her words as the premise from the very beginning.

Subaru: “Do you have the proof… that everything should be done the way you say, and everything will happen the way you say?”

Louis: “Proof?”

Subaru: “Do you have the proof, that if I regain «Natsuki Subaru», the me present right now would disappear…!”

Louis: “We don’t. We don’t you know. It seems we don’t. As we don’t. We don’t we’re telling you. We don’t though. Even though it seems we don’t. It seems we don’t as we’re telling you. Even though it means we don’t, you know… Will that, give you any solace?”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “It’s just going around in circles, onii-san. Even we can’t speak of what we don’t know. If we or onii-chan, nii-sama die, then will what was eaten come back, we wonder—— To be honest, we never returned something eaten by us, so we dooon’t~ actually knooow~. After all, we’ve eaten it up, you know.”

With an “Ah”, Louis opened her mouth, arraying her frightfully sharp cuspids and scarlet tongue, showing until the interior of her throat to Subaru, appealing a certain zilch.

Others’ Memories, the Memories of someone within others, if heisting things of such kind was to be taken under the name of “Eating”, it was impossible for physical vestiges to remain there.

However, Subaru felt the expression “eaten it up” to be terribly weighty.

Louis: “What will you do, onii-san.”

Once again, Louis questioned Subaru.

In the interval between the questions and answers, Subaru’s hands remained on Louis’s neck. Unable to pour strength, or otherwise, completely withdraw his hands, Subaru continued to cast aside the question regarding his own existence.

Subaru: “Gh, kh… Hk.”

Dying, was frightening. Terrifying.

However, that was a fear differing from what Subaru had tasted by Return by Death four times till now.

The proposition pressing down Subaru’s soul right here and now, was a death comparing and contrasting the choices regarding “the forfeiture of one’s self”.

By nature, that was how what was labelled as “Death” was supposed to be.

Upon dying, the consciousness of that existence would be lost, and something like an opportunity to redo would never be granted.

That was why, Subaru, who continued to take advantage of having opportunities to redo upon making blunders, may not have any right to complain.

To simply be given the choice to disappear or to not disappear, and having the time to be troubled over it, may itself be a luxury.

But, it was his own life.

He must choose whether he would blow that flame out or not by himself; Subaru's heart, having been interposed in such a situation, developed a crack by each passing second.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru had already died four times in this different world. All of them, affairs within a short time frame.

Thrown into a world he was unacquainted with, meeting people he never would have met, and an instant later having to suffer circumstances difficult to avoid, had chased Subaru into his demise.

The time he spent when in a conscious state, when totaled, would not even fit into two days.

It was a short, short time—— However, Natsuki Subaru also had the time of seventeen years lived in the world he was previously in, aside from the two days of this different world.

He had a father. He had a mother. Friends too, though scarce, his relationship with them was a delicate matter and it was uncertain whether he could call them friends, but he had people whom he would at least exchange greetings with. Upon glancing back onto the past, in elementary and middle schools he'd had people whom he got along with, and he was also acquainted with many who resided in his neighborhood.

Though, it had not gone well. Subaru, was incompetent at life.

However, in the vein of not going well, there had been a time of trial and error; though he had never been in a setting where his life was on the line, Subaru still intended to struggle upon his own stage.

Was he going to abdicate, these various times, and accumulated memories?

Should "Natsuki Subaru" return, the fact that they existed would not disappear. However, his current self, who certainly thought of those times, would disappear.

Exchanging promises with Ram, swearing to protect Meili, etching Echidna's forgiveness upon his heart, aggressively imploring Julius to fight, affectionately trusting Beatrice, and Emilia——

——His self, who had fallen in love with Emilia, was it truly going to disappear?

Subaru: "No…"

That realization made the flesh body of Subaru present here on this spot develop cracks, this not being a metaphorical expression.

Crevices emerging on his cheek, fissures like a spider's web emerged on both of his hands on Louis's throat as well. He felt no pain. Neither did he bleed from those crevices. Mysteriously, present within the crevices was darkness. Not the sort possessing flesh or bones; unnatural, unending darkness.

It was in accordance with what he had conjectured, he had not carried over his flesh body of reality.

The body of the Subaru present here was not real. And since it was not real, the current sentiments of his heart directly manifesting, Subaru's body developed fissures, and was shattering.

The crevices expanded, the surface came unstuck and fell.

That was certainly, the body of deceit called "Natsuki Subaru" which Natsuki Subaru had been wearing.

Alongside that which detached and fell in large drops, even his bluff came unstuck and fell.

Subaru: "No, no, no… no… Hk."

Louis: "That's right. It's natural, you know."

Shaking his head in refusal, he denied the fear of the death awaiting him—— No, the fear of forfeiting.

Why, must he vanish. His self, who had just recognized that he was in love with the person he loved.

Subaru: "No…"

Louis: "Hmhm. We get it. We quite do get it. As we get it. We do indeed get it."

Subaru: "No, I refuse… Hk."

Louis: “It’s onii-san’s life, after all. Why must you surrender it to others, you know.”

Subaru: “I, everyone… More, with everyone…”

Wanted to stay longer with everyone.

He was in love. He had fallen in love. Even though in the time which would not even amount to a total of two days, he had been engulfed in doubting them, thinking of killing them, thinking of running away from them, and being suspected by them.

Subaru, had fallen in love with them. Right now, he thought lovingly of them.

If he were to stay with them, if they would cherish Subaru, then he might even grow to love himself, whom he utterly loathed.

That was what he thought. Facing forward, that was what he thought.

Even though in Subaru’s life of always facing backward, this was, at long last, a scintillating spot of sunshine.

Why must he relinquish it.

That was something he——

Subaru: “…I refuse.”

Louis: “That’s right. That’s how it is—— Then, what do you think you should do?”

Subaru: “…I, just as myself.”

Louis: “Yes, onii-san will be, just as onii-san. That’s correct. It got plundered once. It’s a game of musical chairs. The guy sitting on the vacant seat, is *ousama*[196], you know.”

Subaru: “————”

[196] Engrish flip. Means “king” (王様), originally “キング” (king).

Louis: “The opponent who got pushed away, must exit. You have to recognize. Your own existence. You have to shout loudly, that you are real! Hey, isn’t that so!”

Directly below him, at a distance such that their breaths intertwined, widening her eyes illumine blazingly, Louis roared.

With vigor like that of snarling—— no, as a matter of fact, she gnawed Subaru’s wrists which were on her neck, etching admonition and a striking pain upon Subaru.

Staring at the wavering dark eyes, Louis Arneb shouted.

Louis: “Recognize! —— «Natsuki Subaru» is, the closest person to onii-san!”

The howl called for him, telling him to establish oneself.

Telling him to stop doing something so foolish as dying for the sake of someone.

Why, must there be a need for him to sacrifice himself for the sake of someone or the other?

——That too, for the sake of having his self who was not himself, who named his self as him, meet the people he loved, whom he would not be able to meet anymore.

All for the sake of him ceding the time he had spent with them, the priceless days difficult to ever obtain.

As if he would allow himself to do, something so foolish.

Louis: “Well theeen~, kill him! Let’s kill him! Let’s go ahead and kill him! You have to kill him! Do kill him! If you kill him! Let’s end up killing him! Just kill him! End up killing him! If you can only kill him! If you kill and crush him!”

Subaru: “«Natsuki Subaru» will…”

Louis: “Onii-san is this universe’s one and only, not a substitute article for anyone, Natsuki Subaru!”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

This universe’s one and only, not a replacement for anyone, Natsuki Subaru.

Holding hands with Beatrice, striking persiflage with Ram, making Meili pout, being astonished by Shaula's frankness, exchanging smiles with Echidna through frivolous conversations, entrusting his back to Julius, receiving Patrasche's gratuitous love, attaining the right to live, with Emilia.

If the one who possessed those was «Natsuki Subaru», then by Subaru's hands, that man shall.

Subaru: "————"

Tears building up, his field of vision was blurred by the sentiments welling up within him.

His mind had a direct impact on his flesh body. The beating of his heart, his breathing through aching lungs, he could unmistakably feel them vividly right now.

However, what he could feel the greatest right now, were his irresistible tears wielding no answer.

Was that rage or grief, envy or jealousy, guilt or fear?

Just, what was the cause of this violent emotion, Subaru did not know whatsoever. There was lots he did not know. However, with his field of vision fogged by those tears, Subaru looked.

???: "————"

Someone, was overlooking Subaru, Louis.

Staring at the teary-eyed pathetic Subaru, who had pinned Louis down and had his hands on her neck.

Whom that could have been, within what all Subaru's mind could grasp, it could have been only one person.

Subaru: "…Did you, appear because you got scared of me, «Natsuki Subaru»."

???: "————"

The blurry shadow of a person said nothing.

Standing on the white floor, the white world behind its back, the form veiled in gaze of white, was watching Subaru.

Subaru, with his face soggy, informed the existence who had panicked and abruptly appeared forth.

Subaru: “I… I won’t disappear. I don’t want to die. That’s why, I…”

???: “————”

Subaru: “Want to stay together with everyone. I love everyone. That’s why, I’m…”

???: “————”

Subaru: “That’s why, I’m…”

As though an excuse, his complaints stockpiled.

Same as when he had put his hands on Louis’s throat—— Subaru had concluded, that he did not want himself to disappear. Therefore, what he did now was conveying that to the shadow of a person which had appeared.

That also meant that he would, with certainty, kill the opponent before of his eyes, who possessed an identical visage as himself.

After all, he was, “Natsuki Subaru” was, the closest person to him.

That was why, Subaru must be in possession of that right.

Natsuki Subaru, would kill “Natsuki Subaru”, and the single spot of sunshine would be——

Subaru: “That’s why, I’m not you! You and I are…”

Different, he tried to convey that clearly, and sever the possibility.

At the moment he had tried to do so, there was that.

Louis: “…Who, are you talking to, onii-san.”

Dumbfounded, eyes dilated, Louis questioned with an expression as if her conversation had been stalled.

She inclined her neck and glared in the same direction as Subaru, and tried to look at that shadow of a person. However, she knitted her eyebrows in doubt and grimaced, and as her sharp canines quivered,

Louis: "——Nobody, nobody's there, but still, who are you talking to, onii-san."

Subaru: "————"

With her fangs rattling and trembling, Louis whispered so with an expression of disbelief.

In refusal, she erased her expression until then, and made a face like that of being frightened by something,

Louis: "This is, our place… No hindrances are supposed to get in, and yet. In this place, talking to someone aside from us… just stop. Onii-san is our, our…!"

Louis's words, they clung onto him, however Subaru's awareness did not move a bit.

Subaru's awareness, had focused all concentration on the yet-present shadow of a person in his field of vision, not having vanished. His field of vision blurred with tears, the wavering shadow of a person, its contour and features became ever-so-slightly clear.

Who it was, he had no idea whatsoever.

That shadow of a person whose contour and features gradually became clearer, to Subaru seemed as though it was smiling.

Shaking his head, blinking with strength, he tried to look at that diminutive smile with further clarity——

???: "——Why are you trying to choose only one of the two?"

A question was raised, towards him.

With a voice he had never heard before, with the voice of someone, who was not supposed to be present.

Whom he had never seen smiling—— a young girl of blue hair, had been standing there, smiling.

That smiling young girl, whilst continuing to smile, towards Subaru who had sunk in silence, said——

???: “——Stand up!!”

——Her commencing words.

——The young girl, with the utmost relentless voice in the world, shouted at Natsuki Subaru.

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???: “——Stand up!!”

The voice, vanquished the cracking Natsuki Subaru, scourged him, and knocked him down.

Without mercy, without hesitation, the bellow shattered Natsuki Subaru, and accelerated his cracking——much akin to talons artlessly stabbing into his naked heart.

???: “Stand up!”

The young girl of blue hair, raised her voice facing Subaru.

Glaring at Subaru, the young girl, with a loud voice, howled. Howled. She was howling.

At Natsuki Subaru, who remained on his knees, who had pinned a young girl down, and had fissures emerge on his dumbfounded face.

???: “Stand up!!”

Her bellow, repeated.

Limitlessly and endlessly, callously and inconsiderately, it knocked Subaru’s heart down.

Why, must such words strike him.

It was painful. It was hurtful. It was excruciating. It was sorrowful. His heart, even now, was on the verge of shattering.

Never in his life had he been struck with such agonizing decisions from one to the next, without even having prepared his heart beforehand—— he had somehow stopped lamenting that crisis.

And so, at the very least, he had arrived at a conclusion. And so, was it not just fine anymore?

???: “Stand up!”

The young girl before his eyes, by no means approved of the complaints, the obstinate conclusion, the heart afraid to forfeit, making Subaru’s heart cower. Laden with a resolute purpose of rejection, she piled up the potent words.

He had come to a decision. Could she not just affirm it? At the very least, show being troubled over it. It was alright, was it not? He had been troubled sufficiently. Yet, the young girl went so far, all for the sake of having Subaru be,

???: “Stand up——!”

As his heart continued to shatter to fragments, she did not pardon Subaru, who had decided.

???: “Stand up——!”

Was she, still going to say that?

Why, was this young girl, this voice?

Despite it being so hurtful, so excruciating.

???: “Stand…! Stand! Stand! Stand up!”

Just who, was this young girl.

Just where in his reminiscences, was this young girl.

Never had he exchanged words with her. Even memories of her were not present within the current Subaru.

Who she was, what kind of person she was; he had known merely her outward appearance.

Their relationship was one such that he would not even bother giving up for her sake.

Yet, why, was his chest so warm.

Why, was there a fever rising from the interior of his chest.

???: “Stand up, Natsuki Subaru! Stand up! ——Rem’s hero!!”

The tearful voice of the young girl not present in his memories, shouted to be a hero by that voice, his heart trembled.

Subaru’s heart trembled, in such a good condition that he almost wanted to laugh, with the notion of something so absurd as that being possible.

The cracks, the fissures, continued to accelerate.

That was, quite literally, the spectacle of Natsuki Subaru tearing apart the shell of “Natsuki Subaru”.

However, what slept within that shell, only faintly varied from what was there just previously.

——No, if it were to truly change, it would from now onward.

Continuing to be wished to stand up, gnashing his teeth at his frightened heart, he stood up.

???: “If you’ve stood up, then please go. Go, and save, everything.”

Everything, what did that mean. *Everything*, just what had it meant.

A way of speaking far too absentminded. Just what, did *everything* even refer to.

???: “Everything is everything. Anything and everything. All, everyone, yourself, and the people closest to you as well!”

What was that?

As if something like that, was achievable. Did this girl truly believe he was capable of that?

His self, who lacked in much, who could not even save himself.

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Floating (source)

For the sake of the people Subaru had fallen in love with, for the sake of the people who cherished Subaru, for the sake of the people Subaru wished to cherish, for the sake of his reminiscences with the people he did not want to disappear.

Did she truly believe that this Subaru, who had tried to let go of merely one, was also capable of it?

???: “You can do it. After all.”

“After all”.

“After all”, what.

Give me the strength, the answer. If you’re going to give those, then give them through those words.

I hope that the blue young girl’s, your words, give me——

Rem: “——Subaru-kun is, Rem’s hero.”

Subaru: “————”

Something, fell in the interior of chest.

That which had stagnated in black, as if purified by the echo of the young girl, seemingly a confession of love—— No, not seemingly a confession of love. That had been a confession of love.

Though once again, his reasons for not wanting to give back the place where he belonged to “Natsuki Subaru” increased.

Subaru: “——Ah.”

At the same time, what had increased was not just that.

Purified by the words of the young girl, that which had stagnated in black gave rise to radiance and altered its very form.

And, commenced pulsating from what was the strongest desire stemming from the core of Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “————”

It pulsated. That which had lost anything and everything, and had been deserted by entirety.

Yet furthermore, wishing, desiring, wanting to fasten and secure everything, wanting to not lose anything at all from these hands, wanting to not let go of oneself, from oneself's own hands.

In concordance with the cowardly Greed which implored so, it bloomed by becoming a power which granted this wish.

——The Factor wandering and jolting, connected together with existence.

Subaru: "Come—— Cor Leonis."

Within Subaru, the seed of the Greed lost of destination budded.

And, standing firm, his form was——

Rem: "————"

Merely the diminutive smile of the young girl of blue hair, blessed that moment.

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Louis: "——Onii-san?"

Subaru: "————"

Looking up at Subaru, who had slowly stood up at that spot, Louis called out to him.

Pulling the hand that had been on her neck, Louis, with bafflement remaining on her expression, woke her body up from the golden bed her hair had been blanketing, and blinked in seeming perplexment.

Louis: "What, happened? Look, continue the thing from earlier… continue it?"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Continue it…"

Being told to resume, Subaru moistened his lips with his tongue.

When contemplating as an existence of mere mind, both this and temporary peace of mind were naught but meaningless actions closer to habits.

However, by that single action, he had come to notice something.

——He was clear-headed to such an extent that even he himself would be surprised.

The incomprehensible chaos and frenzy from up until a moment ago, both of them had been pulled away by waves, and now he felt at peace as if swimming in the middle of a calm sea. Henceforth——

Subaru: “You don’t need to say anything, anymore. I’m fed up with your gut-wrenching explanation.”

He had managed to recognize how the clod of malice which had taken the form of a young girl before his eyes had twisted and distorted Subaru’s will, using it as per her own conveniences.

At what Subaru had pointed out, Louis said “Nonono” and shook her right and left,

Louis: “Gut-wrenching, you say… how harsh. Even though we had, in our own way, proooperly~ thought of onii-san, and just given *kankoku*[197]…”

Subaru: “Also, stop using words I know for purposefully making it seem sarcasm about myself like this. Even if you try to shake me like this, it’s of no use—— The present me, will no longer waver.”

Louis: “————”

At those words, Louis straitened her eyes. Surely she was unaware of the details of what changes had occurred in Subaru’s self. Even Subaru did not specifically know.

However, the Greed which would not waver by anything, had decided upon Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru had also defined himself.

Into the form wished by the young girl, who had shouted at none but the Subaru of that moment.

[197] Engrish flip. Means “advice/counsel” (勧告), originally “アドバイス” (advice).

Subaru: “————”

Subaru glanced not at Louis, but at the side opposite to her.

There no longer was the form of the girl, who had not too long ago faced Subaru and struck him with words relentless. The moment Subaru stood up and faced forward, she disappeared.

But, perhaps, that was fine.

The reunion with the young girl, was not to take place here, and neither with Subaru.

No, that was not exactly accurate either. Merely, the one to reunite with her, must be the Natsuki Subaru who had recovered his memories with her, his feelings for her.

And, there was no need to form a distinction between that “Natsuki Subaru” and Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “I was told… time and time again, still, huh.”

——He had been told, that even after losing his memories, Subaru was Subaru.

The time when he stubbornly used to think that there was a precise, distinct disparity, that he must differentiate, just that had been Subaru’s encumbrance, chains of curse.

But, so what?

Right now, from Subaru’s perspective, who had ascertained what he must do, that was a guidepost, a thread of hope.

It would surely light Subaru’s path until he pulled it in, reeled it in, got closer, and reached the place where the people whom he cherished, who were holding the front of that thread, were.

That was why——

Subaru: “——Put away your knife and fork, you food-thieving escaped fugitive. There’s no noodle soup for you here.”

Louis: “————”

She widened her eyes.

Louis Arneb widened her eyes, staring at Subaru who had a finger pointed towards her. And perceiving the absence of even the slightest sympathy in Subaru's expression, she cast her eyes down.

Louis: "Ahhh~…"

Her eyes cast down, she leaked a husky sigh.

That had been a sigh conceived with emotions highly difficult to delineate.

Louis, heaving up her body, her shoulders shaking, drew her knees towards herself, and curled up atop her golden carpet.

And, slowly elevating the face which had been cast downward——

Louis: "——Ahhh~, shit, shit, shit. A single step more, a single step more was left, and yet."

With a gaze brimming in abhorrence, Louis glared at Subaru and wrung that out with a voice as though casting a curse.

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "A single step more was left and yet, huh. Why, how come did it fail, huh—— Who tricked onii-san, huh."

That was a tone of voice which had reached a murky conclusion, hatred towards isolation like that of the dead from the depths of hell envying the way of being of the living as they celebrated paradise above ground.

With a voice filled with such resentment, Louis resumed.

Louis: "With a single step more, «Natsuki Subaru» and Natsuki Subaru could've been completely separated, and yet…!"

Subaru: "…What's up with that? Why'd you do something like that?"

Louis: "——Isn't it obvious, because we can't eat the same human twice!?"

Subaru: "——Hk."

Painting out Subaru's dubious voice, Louis screamed with a cracking voice as if vomiting blood.

She set her limbs on that spot and then stood up, and with an expression completely changed from what it had been until then—— with a countenance like that of a beast which had lost its human kindness, she glared at Subaru.

Louis: "Each had to be separate! The «Natsuki Subaru» who got eaten once, and the Natsuki Subaru left to be eaten, each had to be separate. For that, we had concentrated attention on this plan or that and yet… it was all stupidity! Laughable, isn't it!"

Subaru: "…I won't laugh. It's not funny, not one bit."

Louis: "Is that so? Is that really so!? But, onii-san also hates us, isn't that right? Isn't it fun to see our hated self being sad? It must be feeling good, right? Even though onii-san would have… only you would have fulfilled us, who've gotten sick of eating… by only you, us of Satiation could've!"

At Louis, her eyes bloodshot, Subaru whispered "Satiation" within his lips.

If he had not misheard her, the title she had named herself as was supposed to be Gluttony. Why would that now turn into something like "Satiation"?

In front of Subaru, who was perplexed in that manner, Louis shouted, saying "To begin with!" whilst looking up into the white sky.

Louis: "Both Ley of Gourmet! And Roy of Bizarre Eating! Know absoluuutely~ nothing! From one to the next, thoughtlessly, unrestrainedly, eating messily like a bunch of idiots… for our sake, who are locked up here, and don't have the freedom to choose? Don't make us laugh, hopeless siblings!"

Embracing and bringing her yellow hair close to her, Louis disheveled her body and spat.

Her words, Subaru, was unaware of all what they meant, as he stood up straight. Ley or Roy, those which she had brought up, could they be names, perhaps?

However, the existence of Gluttony, Memories, there were certain things he could discern from them——

Subaru: “You get together with your comrades and things like people’s Memories, and Names… is it fine to note it as that? At any rate, you go around stealing things like that. Go around eating things like that. Isn’t that right?”

An instance of getting his Memories eaten, and forgetting who his own self was, would be Subaru.

An instance of getting his Name eaten, and being forgotten by the surroundings and lamenting, would be Julius.

And, perhaps getting both eaten, forgotten by the world and falling into a slumber never to awaken from, was Rem.

All of them, were deeds of Gluttony, of Louis, and her comrades whose names got brought up earlier——

Subaru: “Why the hell are you all doing something like that? What’s the goal of all of you?”

Louis: “——To become happy.”

Subaru: “————”

Made to hear the immediate reply, Subaru halted his breath.

Paying no heed to his reaction, Louis resounded her teeth by clattering them with seeming instability of mind,

Louis: “It’s to become happy. What other goal is there? To become happy is the goal of living, isn’t it? Or, did you think that our loathed self had distorted away from that? Wrong. That’s wrong. It’s wrong anyway. As it’s wrong. Certainly it is wrong. As it’s too wrong. It seems it’s wrong. As we’re telling you it’s wrong! Ahhh~, our soul hurts…!”

Subaru: “What’s the connection between the goal of becoming happy and stealing others’ Memories…”

Louis: “——Saaay~, onii-san, have you ever thought life is unfair?”

Subaru: “I have.”

Louis: “Awaaa.”

Her teeth into the back of her white hand, Louis questioned Subaru. When Subaru nodded his head in agreement as a matter of prompt judgement, Louis loathsomely laughed saying “Of course”.

While deriding, she had her hand with impressions of her teeth crawl up her slim chest.

Louis: “We have, too. Rather, life is unfairness itself. Can’t choose birth, can’t choose parents, can’t choose the environment, can’t choose the future, not a single thing can be chosen. Always, it’s made to be a *kei*[198] of that sort. It’s being atop a *hansoutai*[199].”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “——But, what if that wasn’t the case?”

In front of the silent Subaru, Louis tilted her neck.

Louis: “What if birth could be chosen? What if parents could be chosen? What if the environment could be chosen? What if the future could be chosen? What if all options were as per imagination…? Everyone would choose a better life, isn’t it? Is that wrong?”

Subaru: “That… may be true, but.”

What was the associativity between that and Louis and the others’ crimes, Subaru pondered.

However, Louis clanged her teeth at that doubt of Subaru’s,

Louis: “——That’s it.”

Subaru: “…Ah?”

Louis: “If birth could be chosen, if parents could be chosen, if the environment could be chosen, if the future could be chosen, if all options were as per imagination, everyone would choose a better life—— That is why, we are taking time and making utmost effort, to search the greatest life for us.”

[198] Engrish flip. Means “system” (系), originally “システム” (system).

[199] Engrish flip. Means “conveyor belt” (搬送帯), originally “ベルトコンベア” (conveyor belt).

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “Surely, it is somewhere! Where we can live with our head held high, like us! A future filled with roses, such that we’d think we were glad to have lived this life! Until the time of fortuitously meeting that destined life, we’ll eat, crunch, chew, lick, suck, indulge, gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!”

Her eyes dazzling blazingly, Louis Arneb shouted her lovely ambition out with a roaring voice.

She truly believed, from the bottom of her heart, that this was pursuit for happiness, that this was the sole way for her to grasp the supreme future for herself.

Louis had not discovered any hopes, any expectations for her own life.

For in her mind, the life of the young girl named Louis Arneb had been inferior in its initial disposition. The starting point had been incorrect—— Henceforth, she wished to negate that.

She wanted to win and gain her self who was abound in birth, parents, environment, future, talents, everything.

She had defined precisely that to be an indispensable condition, for enjoying life to the maximum. And so——

Subaru: “For that, you steal the Memories of others, and eat them…?”

Louis: “Once the desired life is found, by affixing the Memories and Name, we will live that life with our head held high. Unfortunately, as of now, everyone’s been omitted from being selected… there were lives which were on the right track but, you know, we won’t be satisfied by a few meager experiences.”

Speaking enthusiastically with a trembling voice, Louis had her finger gently crawl upon her petite body beneath her patchy clothes, and made a charming gesture unbefitting her age—— No, that was not the case.

If her, if Gluttony’s words were true, then she had eaten the lives of innumerable people until now, and through that had procured an amount of resources of experiences beyond what any ordinary man could physically experience.

Men, women, children, elderly, possibly leaping over the fences of even races or species, having her fill of the experiences of every possible existence, tasting them till finishing, a person who indulged in the satiation of lives.

It was just as how Louis had called herself.

She had, grown tired. Of eating the lives of others.

For her, who continued to snitch and eat the “delicious parts” of the lives of all kinds of people, all possible happenings were stale articles, the same hackneyed events with nothing novel to them.

But, just as when he understood Louis’s mental state, he also discovered something he could not understand. That was——

Subaru: “Then why did you, someone who practices such an unbalanced diet, go as far as to use that pain-in-the-butt measure to try and chew me? Is it your obstinacy as a food fighter, something like never excusing what was left to be eaten?”

Louis: “It’s not such a silly reason—— It’s because, onii-san is our destiny.”

Subaru: “————”

Thinking whether he should accept that at face value, feeling much like he was being made fun of, Subaru glared at Louis with rage and vigilance.

However, Louis’s pupils looking at Subaru, present therein was no falsehood in their ardor. She truly was deeply in love with and yearned for Subaru—— to be more precise, for Subaru’s Life.

The reason being——

Louis: “Men and women of all ages, all kinds of humans, races, positions, anything and everything, leaping above it all and eaten all kinds of things we have, but there’s a single thing, which is unknown to us. Do you know what it is?”

Subaru: “What might it be? I don’t know. My good-for-nothing self’s way of grieving or something?”

Louis: “——It’s the experience of Death.”

Subaru, with one of his eyes remaining shut, halted all movement.

Whilst intently watching that Subaru, Louis lifted her slim arms and pointed both her palms towards him.

Louis: “No matter how many of others’ Memories are eaten, it’s impossible. Only the Memories of Death can never be obtained. After all, isn’t that the way it is? Memories, they’re the record of the period of living after all. And so, something like the Memories of the time of dying don’t exist—— Only onii-san is an exception.”

Louis seemingly envied, was jealous of, deeply loved, yearned for the power of Return by Death from the innermost depths of her heart.

The young girl who had grown tired of this world, was deeply in love with and yearned for the man who conferred upon her the solitary fresh moment.

Louis: “Hey hey, what does death feel like? It’s surely rough, right? It’s agonizing, right? It’s terrible, right? It’s painful, isn’t it? There was also a time when it didn’t hurt, isn’t it? Some say it feels good, is that true? When dying, do you actually always feel delighted? Or, do you stop caring anymore? An easy victory? Hey, hey hey, heyheyhey!”

Subaru: “…If you, have my memories of everything till yesterday, then shouldn’t you be knowing all that?”

Louis: “As memories, you see! But, on second thought, that is old, as it’s not real! We want a rawer experience. We can’t be satisfied by a reused stale ingredient. What will satisfy us, is a new, fresh and juicy state of mind nobody is aware of!”

Resuming her words, speaking of her reasons——

Louis: “The sole *tokushuu*[200] Memories in this world, which nobody else can experience! Not just that, but the simplicity of just quickly dying and redoing upon making a mistake! Even upon finding the greatest life for oneself, there’s always the possibility of ruining it by some sort of failure, isn’t that right? But,

[200200] Engrish flip. Means “special/unique” (特殊), originally “スペシャル” (special).

if it's onii-san's life, then that isn't there! It's alright, we'll do it well enough such that nobody will find out!"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Neither Emilia, nor Beatrice, nor Ram, nor Meili, nor Julius, nor Echidna, nor Shaula, nor Patrasche, nor Petra, nor Otto, nor Garfiel, nor Frederica, nor Ryuzu, nor Roswaal, nor Clind, nor Annerose, nor Felt, nor Reinhard, nor Rom-jii, nor Tonchinkan, nor Crusch, nor Ferris, nor Wilhelm, nor Ricardo, nor Mimi, nor Hetaro, nor Tivey, nor Priscilla, nor Al, nor Schult, nor Heinkel, nor Kiritaka, nor Liliana, nobody, no one, nobody, no one, nobody, no one! Deceiving them all, we will live happily!"

Making both of her hands, which had been pushed out, projected so that they were holding out to him, Louis adorably tilted her head.

Louis: "That's why, please—— Let us eat onii-san's life, such that we fill our stomach?"

As though pleading, the young girl, from the multitude of Memories possessed by herself, must have unmistakably chosen the plead, the dependency utmost befitting of this place.

Proof that no matter what kind of ingredients were gathered, should the cooking skills be poor, it would amount to nothing.

There had been a wise saying which Subaru liked, that it was not that the ingredients were bad, merely the cookery was bad.

Never had he realized that to this extent.

Innumerable, multitudinous, numerous experience points ordinary humans could never possess.

Never had Subaru come across an existence, so wasteful and squandering.

Subaru: "——You won't get a third chance. My anguish, my death, my life, everything belongs to me. There's not a single thing, which I'll give you!"

Louis: "————"

Subaru: “Starve to death, bloody bastard. If you can’t choose but a single way to die in life, then that’s what I’d suggest to you—— To suffer the most, in this whole world.”

Gesturing a slash on his own neck with his thumb, Subaru asserted so.

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Norvak (source)

In response to those words, Louis rounded her eyes then looked at both of her hands. And then, covering her face with those hands, looking up into the white sky, she groaned “Ahhhhhhh~”.

Louis: “We, failed. We did fail. We ended up failing. So we did fail. We did end up failing. We quite indeed ended up failing. We ended up failing isn’t it. As we ended up failing… ahh~, ahhhhhhh~.”

With teeth clattering and knees quivering, Louis sunk down to the floor at that very spot.

Her genuinely being astound, was testimony to her coaxing Subaru with equal seriousness. Since the result of that seriousness had been that wording, the style of failure of her spiritual nature held no need to be pronounced.

Neither did Subaru rescind his gaze suggesting “serves you right” whatsoever.

Subaru: “I won’t become as you wished. My name’s Natsuki Subaru, the name given to me by Natsuki Kenichi and Natsuki Naoko—— Nothing else. I am myself.”

Louis: “Even though it may get overwritten, and disappear?”

Subaru: “I’ll teach you a magic spell—— That is that, this is this.”

The magic spell he had struck Julius with, this time it would face and strike himself.

Should “Natsuki Subaru” be recovered, the Subaru of this moment may disappear. However, it was also possible that he may not disappear. There may be a way to not erase him.

He may somehow find a way to share the single spot of sunshine.

Subaru: “I, who enter into others’ hearts with shoes on via speaking bluntly, have no need to be mannerless and occupy the spot of sunshine either. That’s my answer. Cut your hair, stupid.”

Declaring a remark suggesting an act of abandonment, Subaru turned his back towards Louis.

He directed no vigilance towards the young girl sunken to the floor, holding her head. Right now, a way to return from this incomprehensible space was more important than that.

As quickly as possible, he must return to Emilia and the others, and once again tackle Reid's Book of the Dead.

To begin with, why would Reid's Book of the Dead, towards this place——

Louis: "——Ahhh~, enough. So there's no choice but to leave the rest, to onii-chan and nii-sama, huuuh~."

Subaru: "————"

Behind the pondering Subaru, Louis revealed as though grieving.

Hearing that, Subaru, who had his ears on the floor and was knocking the ground, turned around. Louis was lying sprawled atop her own golden hair, covering her face with her palms, flapping her legs.

Onii-chan and, nii-sama.

Bynames Louis had often mentioned. If that was, just as how Subaru imagined——

Subaru: "——Ley, and Roy. Gourmet and Bizarre Eating?"

Louis: "We can't exit this place. That's why, unless onii-chan and nii-sama kindly eat, we can't choose what to eat either… That's why, we made a request."

Subaru: "Request…"

Ruminating the words of a bad premonition, Subaru prompted the other side of those words.

He felt Louis had taken awfully long to vomit out the continuation of those words. Before long, as if tracing Subaru's impatience, Louis's red lips quivered,

Louis: "Isn't this the second time onii-san has come here since last night—— And so, both onii-chan and nii-sama, both of them have noticed. About where, onii-san is."

Subaru: "————"

——It had been made clear, those two menaces now drew near Pleiades Watchtower.

Louis: “Both of them said they were keenly interested in onii-san, you know. That’s a matter of course—— Because you knooow~, onii-san is abundantly doing experiences which they have never tasted before.”

Subaru: “S-shit…! You… Hk.”

Louis: “——Ahhh~, how unfaiiir~.”

Louis casually whispered so, upon Subaru’s shivers, having gotten to know that truth.

Louis’s whisper, possessing no chain of logic, even Subaru immediately understood what it meant.

Subaru: “Is this, an exit!?”

Behind Subaru, who had turned back, a fissure had been generated in the white space, its other side was visible, though flickering.

A clear physical disorder, an inconceivable leap through space originating within.

Inspired by Subaru’s purpose, that he must return to the Library.

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “You cannot. Onii-san can never. Though we wanted you to, you know.”

The existence of the exit, before he could sail across it, Subaru wavered over Louis’s treatment.

Whether it be the sequence of events of him strangling her neck, and furthermore, also including her attitude once her ulterior motive had been made clear, it was perhaps true that she possessed no combat power greater than what her appearance suggested.

That was why, Subaru ending Louis in this place should physically be possible.

Thinking about that for naught but a single instant, the moment he directed his troubled gaze, his true motives got seen through.

Louis: “Even if you suspect, even if you despair, you can’t kill yourself, others, or even those whom you loathe. Spineless coward—— Even though, we licked you gently.”

Subaru: “——Well, your teeth must’ve gotten spoilt. Get them remedied, stupid.”

Subaru declared so with his middle finger raised, at Louis who made a provocative expression.

Without seeing Louis feeling ashamed by those words through, Subaru tried to insert his body into the fissure in space. At that moment, that lone instant, he yielded faltering.

It was not as if he felt sorry for Louis. He felt relieved at the thought of not having to see that face again.

What Subaru felt sorry for, was not his parting with Louis, but the voice that made Subaru stand up.

For that instant alone, the young girl who had appeared, only to enliven Subaru.

Having gotten her Memories and Name stolen, the sole young girl who consequently called out to Subaru at the extremity of the world.

Subaru: “It’s alright—— I remember, the promise.”

Natsuki Subaru would, certainly, never forget that.

Therefore, certainly, they would meet again.

——Ruminating that he would like to hear, not merely her stern voice, but also her tender voice then.

Subaru: “————”

Enthusiastic for that, Subaru had his body leap into the fissure, in order to return under his comrades.

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Louis: “Ahh~, ahh~, ahh~, damnit! Not even turning around, what a man!”

Louis: “Won’t excuse you. Won’t let you escape. Absolutely, absolutely…!”

Louis: “Don’t think it’s over with this, Natsuki Subaru…!”

Louis: “Your life belongs, to ussss~——!!”

Arc 6 Chapter 62 – Tremors of Collapse

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 3 “——Stand Up”, Part 6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——As the white world peeled away, the harlequin world which laid beyond to the other side was slowly reformed.

The enormous, rough and overwhelming paintbrush of god daubed colors to the world.

It was an exotic sensation, as if witnessing the world being painted with colors from a confined, colorless space.

He had heard the legend of God creating the world in seven days, but it did not seem like God had necessarily assembled the building blocks of the world within seven days; it rather felt as if God had painted it out on the colorless canvas.

——The cradle of Od Lagna. Or, the Hall of Memories.

Natsuki Subaru’s existence was being extracted from a seemingly different dimension.

Being separated from that unfamiliar space into the former world, the fragments of his consciousness gradually tied up, and bit-by-bit, his self was being reconstructed——

???: “——Subaru.”

Subaru: “Mm…”

Moaning upon hearing that voice, Subaru opened his eyes and was immediately struck upon by thirst.

As he blinked over and over again as to focus this world seen unclearly, he realized that his back and hips felt something hard and cold. He was perhaps lying against a wall somewhere.

Immediately after that, he noticed signs of an existence before his eyes.

Subaru: "————"

Peering at Subaru's face right in front of him, was an anxious girl with a characteristic pattern in her eyes—— Beatrice, donning a flamboyant dress and a cute appearance.

With her look of marked concern, Subaru realized that he had returned from the Hall of Memories to the former world, to the Watchtower.

Subaru: "——Ah."

Beatrice: "Are you conscious? Are you alright, I suppose? It should be confirmed that you didn't accidentally lose your memories, in fact. First up, you do know Betty, I suppose?"

Blinking her eyes, Beatrice touched Subaru's face and chest in the weighty environment.

Though she knew that it was not something she could confirm by touching him, to someone who was worried, it served as reassurance. As his cheek was touched, Subaru answered with "I'm fine, I'll be alright", adhering to the mood.

Subaru: "No problems at all. I do remember. My memories are safe, you… Beatrice, I haven't forgotten about you. Of course, that goes for everyone else as well."

Beatrice: "…Weeell, you'll get praise for saying Betty's name first, in fact."

Having kneaded Subaru's cheeks, Beatrice let out a sigh of relief and relaxed her eyes upon witnessing him call her name. In response to her reaction, Subaru also loosened his lips and stroked her head without any hesitation.

As he felt Beatrice accept his palm with narrowed eyes, Subaru took a deep breath and reaffirmed his memories, their safety.

Although he had asserted "I remember" before Beatrice, it was something difficult to affirm.

The encounter he'd had immediately prior, had been with the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Louis Arneb.

She was unquestionably a monster who had eaten countless Names and Memories, but that ability of hers, of apparently eating Memories, yet remained unknown to Subaru.

It was uncertain whether taking an actual bite, or just declaring “eating”, or if a even more complex procedure was needed—— The greater the constraints and commitments, the more complex the requirements would, and the power granted to one’s hands would be greater; that was how it usually went. He wanted to deduce it.

Regardless, Subaru had no idea whether those conditions had been fulfilled in the Hall of Memories in the first place or not. Truth was, he had indeed been touched physically, he had been bitten in the arm and gotten licked. If those were the conditions, then he had completely been swept away by the mood and been defeated.

Therefore, the possibility of his memories being filled with holes like leaves eaten by worms, despite showing no conscious symptoms, was pretty probable, but——

Subaru: “——It’s probably fine. The promises and feelings of love, are all still within this heart of mine.”

His heartbeats rose when he thought of Emilia, and felt the desire to caress Beatrice upon being worried. It was proof that Subaru wished for the safety of his comrades, and dubiety disappeared from his mind.

He need not proceed alone, at the very least, and he could never experience those horrors again as he had.

???: “——Natsuki-kun, have you returned?”

A voice stroked Subaru’s eardrums whilst he inwardly reaffirmed that his memories had not been lost.

Raising his face, he saw Echidna, her light-purple hair fluttering, with Beatrice beside him. After seeing her step up, Subaru made a belated realization.

Subaru: “…What about Emilia-chan, and the others?”

“Anastasia”: “Good, seems you have not lost the ability to look around. Do you remember what you had been attempting to do just previously?”

Seeing Echidna ask pompous queries, Subaru glared back into her pale-cerulean eyes and looked at the shadows he sought at her side—— he comprehended that a few of his comrades were missing.

It could not possibly be something cute, such as them hiding behind the various bookshelves within the Library. Touching the thick black cover closed on his knee, Subaru exhaled.

Right now, the members still present here were——

Subaru: “Beatrice and Echidna, and Meili…?”

Meili: “Onii-san, so you’re finally uuup? You really had us on the edge, it seems you overslept.”

Subaru: “Overslept, you say…”

As Meili reprimanded him with hands on her hips, Subaru scratched his head.

Calming his heart down in some way, Subaru tried ascertaining the situation.

He could not see Emilia, Ram, Julius nor Shaula in this room.

Only the aforementioned three were here, and all four of them happened to be non-combatants. That situation alone was plenty strange already, but what was further strange was——

Subaru: “It can’t be that I woke up right after opening the book, right? How much time was I unconscious for?”

Beatrice: “——About an hour, I suppose. Until now the books got finished in a few seconds, so there was concern whether something happened to Subaru, in fact.”

Subaru: “One hour…”

Thanks to Beatrice’s answer, Subaru figured out the time lag between the Hall of Memories and reality was not large.

The challenge he faced now truly was different from what would have happened had he read the Book of the Dead normally. That Hall of Memories really did exist somewhere, and the time he spent there seemed to be legitimate as well.

He had encountered Louis, had his heart tormented, licked by Louis, and tried strangle her throat and deny “Natsuki Subaru”—— and, was made to refuse that with gently harsh words.

There was nothing wrong with the thought that all that time could have been some convenient dream seen by Subaru. However, it could not be ignored that a finite amount of time had passed as a matter of fact.

Subaru: “Why are Emilia-chan and the others, not with you?”

“Anastasia”: “While you were, quite literally, immersed in that book, some abnormalities came up here as well, you see. The four not present here are going around, dealing with them.”

Subaru: “Abnormalities…?”

“Anastasia”: “The first one to notice the abnormalities was Shaula. It could perhaps be said that it was expected of the one who holds the position of defending this Watchtower.”

Although the content she spoke seemed calm, her tone was not. Echidna responded to Subaru’s words with a voice, her repressed sense of urgency leaking into it.

With her hand, she pointed to the entrance of the room, the staircase which led downstairs,

“Anastasia”: “Shaula said that something was approaching the Tower from the outside. She acted fast after that. In order to confirm the reason behind the abnormalities, she rushed out giving nobody the time to even stop her…”

Meili: “The cool onii-san then went after heeer. Meanwhile, the silver-haired onee-san and the maid onee-san went to see the sleeping younger sister.”

Subaru: “So that left all four of us in this place—— To be honest, though it makes me feel a bit lonely, it was the correct answer. Especially in this situation, I don’t want any from my companions to have their whereabouts unknown.”

Responding to Echidna and Meili’s report, Subaru sighed in response to this situation of utter disarray.

Subaru was thankful to Shaula, who noticed the concerning matter, to Julius, who followed her, and to Emilia and Ram for their actions as well.

If the body of the blue-haired girl, Rem, could be safeguarded, then one of his sources of worry could be quashed.

——In face of the emergencies that would hereafter come to pass.

“Anastasia”: “——That reaction, Natsuki-kun, do you happen to be aware of something?”

Subaru: “————”

Abruptly, Echidna asked that upon seeing Subaru’s thoughtful expression. Targeted by that mindful gaze, Subaru tried to respond that very second, as he shook his head.

There was no need for him to mix up or complicate matters further. All he had to do was to speak those vexing words as they were and rack his head together alongside his comrades.

Subaru: “I’ll tell you what happened starting from the conclusion—— The plan of reading Reid’s Book and seeing through his past failed. I couldn’t see his past, and there’s no time for that now.”

Beatrice: “You could not see his past, I suppose? What in the world does that mean, in fact?”

Subaru: “Something got in the way—— The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony.”

Beatrice: “——Hk!”

After a beat, he managed to convey those words.

Hearing the words that came from Subaru’s mouth, Beatrice blinked her eyes in astonishment. Though Subaru had first heard of the expression “Sin Archbishop” from Louis, it perhaps was not the same for them.

“Anastasia”: “Though it is quite difficult to conceive, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony being in the Book… Saying that they were in the Book has room for doubt in this situation, but are they really in it?”

Echidna furrowed her eyebrows and folded her arms, pondering with a strained face. In her eyes levitated doubt, but even greater unease. On top of that, unease directed toward Subaru.

That her unease regarded Subaru’s memories was so obvious, that it could be ascertained without words.

Subaru: “Though Beatrice had said the same earlier, I didn’t lose my memories… That’s what I mean. I haven’t forgotten the faces of my friends, and my love for Patrasche is still genuine.”

Meili: “I don’t know why Ground Dragon-chan’s name was mentioned there thoooough…”

Puffing up her cheeks, Meili expressed irritation due to the manner in which Subaru spoke.

Her anger was befitting. The truth was, Subaru had the criminal record of losing his memories once already. The presence or absence of his memories was uncertain, and nobody could prove the unconscious, asymptomatic loss of memories.

——However, only the Subaru present here at this place, could declare that was not the case.

Subaru: “It makes me happy that you’re all so worried, but I haven’t forgotten anything. I give myself a stamp of approval.”

“Anastasia”: “I am very doubtful of the worth of that stamp of approval right now… But if you possess such confidence, then I’m sure you must have some basis for it, yes?”

Subaru: “——Because when I was completely cornered by Gluttony, Rem saved me, you see.”

Beatrice: “————”

The potency of the name he had mentioned echoed merely within Beatrice.

That was why, whilst Echidna and Meili remained with puzzled expressions, Beatrice on the other hand was completely astonished, eyes opened wide.

Subaru nodded in response to that Beatrice—— No matter how trivial his memories were, the only reason Subaru could boast around having not gotten them stolen by Louis was solely her existence.

In that place, at a time Subaru’s heart was on the verge of shattering, the young girl had encouraged him, made him stand up.

Her existence did not allow for such an opening to be given to Gluttony, was what he believed.

Beatrice: “Subaru, let’s have a detailed explanation, I suppose. That too…”

Looking directly into Subaru's black eyes, she asked for a detailed explanation. However, as the young girl would finish speaking, she was interrupted, and a faint quake rocked the Tower—— the sensation of quaking repeated.

Incredibly, there was no sign of the bookshelves shaking, but the shaking of the Tower itself was without a doubt artificial. This was probably because of the emergency that Shaula went to take care of.

Henceforth, Beatrice blinked merely once, then resumed.

Beatrice: "As briefly as possible, in fact."

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Subaru: "——When I dove into the Book of the Dead, I was brought to a white, empty place instead of Reid's past. That's where the girl who's the Sin Archbishop… of Gluttony was, she named herself as Louis. According to what that Louis said, that place was something like Od Lagna's cradle, the Hall of Memories, so it seems."

Inside the Tower, with continued tremors pursuing the soles of their feet, Subaru commenced explaining what he had seen in the Book of the Dead.

The reality of his encounter with the girl in the white space, and that place that was called the Hall of Memories. The interposition of a supernatural existence possessing overwhelming strength, Od Lagna.

Though they were just a bunch of words and phenomena unknown to Subaru, they must be worthwhile information for those aware of both the common knowledge and absurdities of this world.

And in actual fact, in response to what Subaru had explained, Beatrice thoughtfully muttered "Od Lagna…".

Subaru: "Louis said it was a mechanism to keep the world from breaking or something. Do you have any idea about it?"

Beatrice: "Betty isn't well-knowledgeable regarding that either, I suppose. But, just that it is the core point of this world… The place where all Mana returns to, is what it's said, in fact."

Shaking her head in response to that question, such was Beatrice's answer. Putting her finger on her sliding drills, she continued fidgeting with her soft hair.

Beatrice: "All Mana returns to Od Lagna, and gets circulated… In other words, Od Lagna is an existence heavily tied with the death and rebirth of Spirits. That's why it can't be stated as something unrelated to Betty and the others."

"Anastasia": "However, we are special due to our origins. Our existence does not go by way of Od Lagna. In that sense, unlike other normal Spirits, we are able to hold an objective view at Od Lagna, I suppose."

Subaru: "Unlike normal Spirits, you say… Is that so. I guess that's why you've all been living for longer than your appearance lets off."

Echidna took over Beatrice's words, and Subaru was convinced by what she said.

Though the topic of conversation itself had gotten deviated, it seemed it was true that Beatrice and Echidna had lived for several hundreds of years.

The reason for the longevity of their lives was perhaps their origin as Spirits.

Subaru: "If you ask me, I think Beatrice's cuteness makes her more of a fairy than a Spirit."

Beatrice: "…That, Subaru said that once before too, I suppose. It seems stupid Subaru doesn't know, but the word «fairy» is not a compliment here, in fact. So, weeell, Betty can't be so meekly content, nor angry, for being insulted, so it's just weird, I suppose."

Subaru: "Hmm, is that so. Apologies for my rudeness, then."

Certainly, he had heard that in foreign places home to fantasy, the image of fairies deceiving and harming humans was quite common.

If that thought applied to this world as well, then it was natural that calling someone a fairy wouldn't be considered a compliment.

Subaru: "Sorry. I meant that you're so cute that I want to eat you up."

Beatrice: "The feeling of wanting to eat being complementary to cuteness is what is strange, in fact!"

Subaru: “Huh, is that so? Don’t you kinda just feel like putting cute stuff inside your mouth?”

Meili: “That reminds me, bad animal-chans sometimes take their babies in their mouth thoughtlessly and then crunch them to death, isn’t iiit.”

Beatrice shivered in fright as a response to Meili’s unnecessary remark.

Regardless, the topic had deviated once again. What was crucial here was——

“Anastasia”: “——The cradle of Od Lagna. What kind of place is the Hall of Memories?”

Subaru: “The place where souls are filtered, it’s even been given that title, it seems?”

“Anastasia”: “Filtering souls… in the sense of filtering and cleansing them? I cannot view that as a joke in the slightest, given that the role Od Lagna played was supposedly to circulate Mana.”

Subaru yet again agreed to Echidna’s views.

Having witnessed that actual space, Subaru was unable laugh at it and call it an exaggeration.

The souls of all those perished, would arrive at the Hall of Memories and get circulated.

Afterwards, the soul would have its indelible stains, like memories or history collected over the stretch of life, washed off, becoming a pure existence and gain a novel life once again.

Subaru: “I actually think it’s a pretty good explanation. The system reuses the souls of the dead… and the Memories which get washed over there, become books called the Books of the Dead in this Library.”

“Anastasia”: “So you say that they do not disappear to someplace, but instead as a matter-of-fact the world keeps the dead in memory. Looking at these bookshelves, it is not possible to call you a budding poet in jest, either.”

These bookshelves recorded all those that had been born in this world, and reached the Hall of Memories.

In other words, the Hall of Memories was a place for compiling and creating the Books of the Dead. A system whereby the Memories, having been prepared in the form of books, got placed as Books of the Dead in these bookshelves.

And, Gluttony was acting selfishly with respect to how the memories and history of individuals should originally be, thus putting evil to work.

——That was precisely the identity of the power endowed upon Gluttony.

Subaru: “If that’s true, then the function of filtering souls that Od Lagna was originally supposed to do, is being done by them on their own accord. That way, they gulp down the chipped off Memories into their stomachs, and have been literally eating the lives of others.”

When put into words, it could be understood how viscous a deed that was.

And beyond that, Louis had declared it to be “a trial and error for becoming happy”. That she would snatch and eat every possible life, and select a joyful life suitable to her from them.

It was equivalent to continually attempting to win a lottery until ultimately hitting victory.

As a result of having gained the right to draw the lot infinitely, Louis and her elder brothers chose the path of turning others into food and thus, grasping happiness—— In Subaru’s perspective, that was frightening and dreadful.

Not Louis and the others’ judgement. But the fact that their thought was not something special, something abnormal.

Should one gain the right to draw the lot boundlessly, anyone would draw until hitting victory.

That was why the actions of Louis Arneb were a desire exceedingly, respectably, wholly human——

Beatrice: “Even if that’s the case, you’re not supposed to continue drawing the lot knowing others will be sacrificed, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Beatrice…”

Beatrice: “Knowing that there will be sacrifices but still continuing to draw the lot, isn’t the way a sane person would think, in fact. And so, there exists no room for sympathy for a Sin Archbishop, I suppose.”

Reading into Subaru’s idea, Beatrice categorically declared so.

That was an extremely clear distinction, being trapped in the thought itself was unworthy of compassion. Beatrice was well-aware of Subaru's true thoughts, and had merely spoken the words Subaru himself was unable to say.

Indeed, there was no room for sympathy.

The persons themselves may not be responsible for the situation they had been placed in, or for lacking a place to belong. Even so, performing a misstep on their very first step, and thereafter continuing to travel down the wrong path, was the persons' choice.

No matter who, they must reap what had been sown.

Meili: "But, it's pretty straaange. Why did the book, despite knowing the details of when he was alive, connect to that unknown plaaace?"

Subaru: "That's… because the soul of a dead person's recycled in the Hall of Memories, so the book sold in wholesale connected directly to its producer… No, that explanation is incomplete."

Subaru was unable to give a clear answer to Meili's doubts.

Why was Reid's Book of the Dead connected to the Hall of Memories?

At the very least, the Subaru prior to losing memories was supposed to have read a Book of the Dead at least once. He had heard that Julius also read one at the same time, and he had even already experienced reading Meili's Book in a former loop.

But within those experiences, there was no record of the reader being thrown into that space.

Then, they should perhaps consider it to be Louis's interference.

Subaru: "But, it looked like Gluttony didn't intend to summon me. It felt like my arrival was out of calculations, even for her… So she shouldn't have used some ploy on Reid's Book of the Dead."

Beatrice: "——There is one hypothesis, in fact."

In front of Subaru, who was drowning in his thoughts, Beatrice spoke up with a finger raised.

Looking at her fingertip, Subaru urged her to continue with, “Hypothesis?”.

Subaru: “Tell us. What possibilities can you think of?”

Beatrice: “The Books of the Dead in the Library record the Memories that get stripped away from souls in the Hall of Memories, I suppose. The normal mechanism is to read them in the form of a Book… But, what do you think will happen if that record is used for other purposes, in fact?”

Subaru: “Using the memories of the dead in a way other than Books of the Dead? But, how else can they be used aside from being Books of the Dead…”

“Anastasia”: “——Ah, I see, is that so. Intelligent indeed, Beatrice.”

Subaru furrowed his eyebrows with doubts on his head, in response to Beatrice’s words. But Echidna interjected with seeming comprehension. Not just that, following up with Echidna, even Meili put her fingers on her mouth, and said “Oh right”,

Meili: “Could it refer to that?”

Subaru: “Waitwait, don’t make a face as if you understand. You really hate losing, huh. It’s nice finding a new part of yourself in that way like a child, but just honestly saying you don’t understand what you don’t is perfectly forgivable, given the position you’re in.”

Meili: “Isn’t onii-san the one here who hates losing, huuuh? Even I can properly understand when I put my thoughts to it and then say that I dooo… The redhead onii-san above, is like that, isn’t heee?”

Brushing Subaru aside with her hands, Meili confirmed with Beatrice. Subsequently, Beatrice let out a sigh,

Beatrice: “Meili’s idea is correct, I suppose… Reid is like that, in fact.”

Subaru: “Um, that means?”

“Anastasia”: “Reid’s past could not be referred to through his Book of the Dead. That is because there is no record of Reid Astrea actually in it. Reid’s record right now is being used differently—— In order to reconstruct Reid Astrea in this Tower, as an examiner.”

Subaru: “Ahh!”

Hearing Echidna’s explanation, Subaru finally came to understand as well.

It was convincing, if that were indeed the case. It did not contradict all that had happened as a result of Subaru reading the Book of the Dead.

Beatrice: “Reid’s Memories are being utilized not for being read but for reconstruction, I suppose. It can be conjectured why Subaru couldn’t read them earlier, in fact.”

Subaru: “Along with that, it also explains how the me of yesterday got his Memories eaten by Louis at the Hall of Memories.”

It was beyond doubt that the Subaru who had been there until yesterday had noticed the same strategy for defeating Reid as the Subaru who was present now. And as a result of trying it out, he had read Reid’s Book in the Library, and was sent to that white world, as well.

The truth was, Louis herself had said that this had been her second time meeting Subaru, after the previous night. She had eaten Subaru’s Memories upon their first contact, and tried to consume even the leftovers when they met the second time.

Subaru: “But, if you take that into consideration, then this Book can never be used as a Reid strategy guide, huh… No, forget that, this is a dangerous Book that would send you straight to an unwished one-on-one confrontation with Gluttony.”

“Anastasia”: “I suppose so. Regardless, though unexpected, it is fortunate that we figured out the reason behind Natsuki-kun’s memory loss. Taking memories away was not a function of the Tower… Because for the moment, the Tower likely did not aim to create a trap which led to contact with Gluttony.”

Subaru: “That’s, weeell, hm, I guess that’s true.”

It was unknown whether the creator of the Tower had assumed that it would take someone to an instant death trap. It was perhaps only incidental that it ended up like this; that was what Subaru would prefer believing.

Otherwise, the personage who had prepared the Tower's facilities possessed an extremely destructive way of thinking, or possessed a personality nasty like that of a demon.

Though Subaru had no memories of it, Shaula referred to them as Master and claimed them to be the same person as Subaru, so he currently feared damage caused by gossip more than anything.

Subaru: "Reid was reconstructed, and the book was empty. That's why that Book of the Dead connected directly to Od Lagna… would that be correct?"

Beatrice: "That's the only hypothesis as of now, I suppose. It's still a mystery why one of the Gluttonies was hidden and lurking in there, in fact. But, the one thing that can be said would be…"

A series of inexplicable events had happened around Reid's Book of the Dead.

There was one hypothesis around that. Naturally, questions whose answers were yet undiscovered remained unanswered. However, unfortunately, Subaru and the others did not have the time to ponder over that question.

Its proof being——

???: "——Echidna! Is everyone alright!?"

Rushing up the stairs, a solitary Knight arrived to the Library of Taygeta. Echidna quickly turned her head backwards and rounded her eyes.

"Anastasia": "Julius, you seem in quite the hurry, do you not?"

Julius: "Unexpected matters have come up. I want to hear everyone's thoughts, as soon as possible… Hm."

The good-looking young man, Julius, approached them whilst answering Echidna's question.

He had stiffened his cheeks with faint nervousness and vigilance, but upon crossing eyes with Subaru sitting on the floor, his yellow eyes slightly widened.

Julius: "So you have woken up, Subaru. That is indeed very fortunate. Do you know who I am?"

Subaru: “That worry comes first, I guess. Umm, so you are…?”

Julius: “——I knew it.”

Subaru: “I’m lying! I’m joking! You’re Julius Juukulius! What’s up with that «I knew it», with that serious face of yours! I returned all fine and dandy!”

Julius: “Hmph. I was also joking. Think of it as payback for your incurable childishness—— Now I shall be telling you something which is not laughable in the slightest.”

Subaru made a strained expression, having gotten cornered in the argument. Snorting in response to Subaru’s reaction, Julius subsequently removed any relaxation from his expression without delay.

Just as he had stated, he intended to report something which was laughing matter.

Julius: “While I would like to hear Subaru’s report regarding the Book of the Dead, this is an emergency—— The abnormalities Miss Shaula noticed have been confirmed outside of the Tower.”

Subaru: “I can’t see that Shaula anywhere though…”

Julius: “She, is dealing with the threat from the outer wall of the Tower at this very moment. However, that will surely not suffice.”

Subaru glared at Julius, gesturing the roundabout nature of his words. Receiving that sharp gaze, Julius let out a short sigh, and commenced by saying “Apologies”,

Julius: “You all must have also noticed that there are slight tremors. They are, footsteps.”

Subaru: “Footsteps?”

Julius: “Yes.”

Subaru and the others tilted their heads upon hearing that unexpected word; Julius nodded towards them, and after a moment, he announced.

Julius: "——The Witchbeasts which existed all throughout the Augria Sand Dunes are charging towards this Tower all at once. Although Miss Shaula is fighting them back, it is only a matter of time before they manage to break through inside."

Arc 6 Chapter 63 – Five Obstacles

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 4 “Five Obstacles”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——The arrival of the Witchbeasts to the Watchtower.

Upon Julius’s report of the Witchbeasts of Augria Sand Dunes making a collective charge inside, the cheeks of Subaru and the others stiffened, and a hue of seriousness dyed everyone’s eyes.

What they could feel at the soles of their feet, were tremors faintly jolting the Tower’s floor and rumbling—— upon hearing that they were literally the footsteps and neighs of Witchbeasts echoing across the Tower, it was impossible to not feel unrest.

Subaru: “Though I barely know about this desert aside faintly knowing how humongous it is…”

The desert’s severity which foiled his plan to flee at its onset, back when he attempted to escape the Tower upon being impelled to be suspicious of everything, was something Subaru had not actually experienced.

It was just that, the sight of unending sands spreading as far as the eye could see was difficult to forget, so he was able to make suitable imaginations.

Regardless, it was also hard to imagine that the desert was overflowing with living organisms——

Julius: “The Augria Sand Dunes are a place where Witchbeasts live gregariously, you see. Such that the Witchbeasts targeting any human that may enter the sands is a bigger issue than the severity of the environment.”

“Anastasia”: “Formerly, there was a military contingent dispatched with the plan to annihilate the Witchbeasts of the Sand Dunes. Though, the result of that should be obvious from the sound of these footsteps.”

Julius and Echidna gave their respective responses to Subaru’s question.

In other words, Subaru’s hope of the rumbling earth being naught but mere paper tigers and that the number of incoming enemies would be, at best, at the level of a zoo, had been an immense miscalculation. To be precise, it was rather at the level of an entire savanna of Witchbeasts.

Understandably enough, it was sufficient to make one despair. However——

Meili: “——So, you realized that you should call meee?”

Raising her voice, so spoke Meili whilst fiddling with her braid.

The only one to not show any signs of anxiety upon the report of the Witchbeasts’ arrival, was her. Though her reaction did not intend to imply that this was not an abnormality.

Her reaction was the kind that indicated she did not perceive the Witchbeasts as a threat.

Julius: “Although it is quite pathetic, it is exactly as you say. I want to borrow your strength.”

Cheeks stiff, Julius nodded in response to Meili’s question.

Leaving the Witchbeasts charging in great numbers to Meili, who possessed the ability to command Witchbeasts—— Julius’s idea was understandable. The first thing Subaru had come up with had also been this.

However, a strange sensation caused the alarm bell to ring depths of Subaru’s chest.

Beatrice: “Subaru? What happened, I suppose? That’s a somewhat strange face, in fact.”

Subaru: “…Having a strange face, has been my destiny ever since I was born.”

Beatrice: “That goes only for your eyes, I suppose.”

Immediately beside him, Beatrice noticed his bitter expression and looked at him in concern. While her gaze remained directed at him, he took a deep breath.

Along with a large amount of carbon dioxide being exhaled, came something shapeless like unease. That was indeed, something ambiguous and vague, with no tinge of concreteness.

Julius: “Subaru, are you concerned about something?”

Subaru: “Don’t come at me asking questions one after another. That being said, I guess it’s my fault for making a face that’d give that impression. On top of apologizing for it, I have something else to say. An exclusive scoop I picked up from the Book of the Dead.”

Beatrice: “————”

Julius held his breath; even those around him, Beatrice et al, who had already heard of it, opened their eyes wide in shock. In all honesty, that reaction was predictable, but he was unable to explain without stating it.

The reason behind the sudden change in situation, why the Witchbeasts were charging towards the Tower in such great numbers——

Subaru: “——It’s Gluttony. The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony is sending the Witchbeasts to the Tower.”

Julius: “——Hk, why?”

Subaru: “I’ll have to apologize for that. I met one of Gluttony in Reid’s Book of the Dead. To be exact, I reunited with one of Gluttony. It seems I met her last night as well. That is…”

Julius: “The reason behind your loss of memories, is what you mean, huh.”

Subaru nodded in response to Julius’s immediate arrival at the conclusion.

Though difficult to say it was as per expectations, Julius’s ability to understand was immense. By associating the name and power of Gluttony, by using that knowledge, he immediately reached the desired conclusion.

Julius: “I cannot say I am not unsettled. I ask again, did you truly not get anything stolen away from you this time?”

Subaru: “Fortunately, aside from my whole life being stalked and shared, I’m still complete. Though, I just explained all that to Beatrice and the others.”

Julius: “I see… Beatrice-sama?”

Beatrice: “Betty is also anxious about what you fear, in fact. For the time being, no abnormalities are present, I suppose.”

Subaru: “You really can’t trust me, can you…”

With a convinced expression, Julius immediately turned to Beatrice for confirmation. Though Subaru understood that it was a matter beyond helping, he still found himself at a complex state of mind. Regardless——

Subaru: “It seems the enemy grasped that our presence here due to the incident last night. After about half a day… they’ve come here to meddle along with their pets, is that what this means, huh?”

“Anastasia”: “Considering the normal speed of traveling, arriving at this Tower in half a day is difficult to conceive. Especially considering the obstacles Witchbeasts pose as during the course of the journey. However…”

Subaru: “However?”

“Anastasia”: “Unlike the difficult journey we had, if Gluttony holds the power to make the Witchbeasts abide their commands… then the issue would be merely the speed of travel.”

Subaru crossed his arms with a strained expression upon Echidna’s comment, whilst she shrugged her shoulders.

Gluttony possessed the power to make the Witchbeasts abide their command, it would be appropriate to assume that as minimum. At the very least, there was no room of doubt in that the Witchbeasts were advancing towards the Tower due to the enemy’s direction.

It should be kept in mind that they possessed such means as well.

Subaru: “What about the issue of the speed of travel?”

“Anastasia”: “…The vast sandy terrain. Even if the Witchbeasts were to not pose as an obstruction, the speed is bound to fall should one tread through sand. I would like to believe that it would still take a couple of days, even if the path taken is straight to the Tower and one never gets lost.”

Subaru: “But, are there any other possibilities?”

“Anastasia”: “——It would be a totally different story if an aerial route is used, in case the overland route would cost time.”

Subaru: “An aerial route…!”

With the presentation of that unforeseen possibility, Subaru openly expressed his astonishment, his black eyes widened.

If an aerial route were feasible, then it would certainly reduce travel time drastically. A flying bird would be faster than a man walking, that made sense.

Subaru: “Due to my arbitrary preconceptions, I thought means of flying would be an exception. Magic exists anyway, so something like flying in the sky is pretty normal, huh.”

Beatrice: “That isn’t the case, I suppose. Flying is a complex variety of magic, its procedure is very complicated, in fact. Considering the danger of crashing, normally nobody would be willing to take the risk and do it, I suppose. Only an idiot or a genius, or otherwise an idiotic genius, would do it, in fact.”

Julius: “Though it was commonly said that Margrave Mathers makes attendance to the Royal Castle through the skies…”

Beatrice: “That would be the idiotic genius, I suppose.”

It seemed that Beatrice did not particularly like this Margrave, whom he had not met.

Whilst looking at the cutely pouting Beatrice, Subaru tilted his head upon being told that flying magic was unusual.

Subaru: “If it’s not magic then, a huge bird… Ah, a dragon! They must’ve ridden on some flying dragon’s back or something!”

“Anastasia”: “In fact, the technique of taming flying dragons has been established as a secret in the Vollachian Empire to the south. Though the Empire has full monopoly on that technique, with the evil techniques of Gluttony then simply usurping it would be simple.”

Subaru: “They could just get it by someone who knew that technique. By taking away their Memories with a lick, huh.”

Should that be considered, the enemy owned far too powerful methods when it came to intelligence.

By eating the Memories, everything regarding what was intended to remain secret could become one’s own; by eating the Name, that very happening, along with the opponent’s entire existence, could be written off.

——Often it was said that memories were what shape people.

Subaru: “————”

Subaru thought that a person’s worth, path, was etched into memories and history.

Possessing a sense of values such that right now, more so than ever, made him believe this, Subaru truly despised the power of the foul-playing Gluttony from the very bottom of his heart.

Ruinous.

Gluttony’s power, of plundering the memories of others, was evil that blasphemed against everything and brought ruin.

To use it for one’s own joyfulness, for one’s own pursuit of happiness, was absurd. It was akin to distorting and twisting fate with mistaken methods, illogical ways.

——Well, is onii-san, who uses Return by Death, going to be saying that?

Subaru: “——Hk.”

Beatrice: “Subaru!”

Beatrice called out to Subaru who subconsciously bit his lip with force.

Feeling his arm being pulled, his line of sight and her deep-blue eyes then intersected. He could feel a sharp ache at the edge of his mouth, and it was pathetic that this painful wound had been inflicted by his own bite.

Licking the blood exiting the wound with his tongue, Subaru lowered his head saying “Sorry”.

Subaru: “For a moment, her ridiculing face came up in my head, you see. Making that thing have a thoroughly tearful and sorry face’s one of the biggest goals, but… the problem which comes first are that thing’s big brothers.”

Julius: “It is already known that there are multiple Sin Archbishops of Gluttony, but did you grasp something?”

Subaru: “It’s pretty confusing because of their incomprehensible first-person pronoun, but, probably. There’s one rolled up in the Book of the Dead, and that one’s got two big brothers, I think.”

In the Hall of Memories, Louis had frequently mentioned the bynames “Onii-chan” and “Nii-sama”. If that was to be taken at face-value, then it would mean that Louis had two elder brothers.

Whether that were to be exactly taken as proof of Gluttony being three siblings was a separate issue——

Subaru: “At the very least, she wasn’t the type who’d use such a tactic. Weeell, not that I, who kinda lost to the force of her personality, can say that.”

What would have had happened had he gone as per the enemy’s plan, and strangled that slender neck?

Were it not for the voice of the young girl of blue hair that had appeared then, then, by now, he would’ve surely done so.

Meili: “——Sooo, what does onii-san want to saaay? Making stopovers here and there and beating around the bush is onii-san’s bad habit, reaaally.”

Seemingly interrupting her drowsiness, Meili jolted her body and made a dissatisfied expression.

The young girl, who was supposed to have already gotten her role assigned to her since the beginning, seemed to be incredibly discontent for being made to wait as-is.

Comprehending her displeasure, Subaru commandeded with his hand with an “I know”,

Subaru: “I understand how you feel, but this is the minimum necessary conversation. Beating around the bush’s certainly a bad habit of mine, but think of it as a part of my charm and be charmed…”

Meili: “Do you want to get chewed uuup?”

Subaru: “Sorry! It’s just that, a ton of Witchbeasts have come! Then, let’s request Meili-sensei, who’s an expert in Witchbeasts! That kind of flow is normal, right? I must’ve said. The enemies are the ones who stole my Memories.”

Meili: “That meaaans…”

Meili lowered her tone once again, seeing Subaru speak cautiously. The true meaning of what Subaru wanted to convey had been conveyed to her as well.

And the same went for his comrades around them, who had changed their expressions.

Taking an extensive view of the faces of his party members, Subaru resumed whilst scratching his head.

Subaru: “I’ll introduce by saying it’s my fault, okay? But, they have my Memories—— They’ll lay traps knowing the strengths of our lineup. We’ll have to beat them at their own game.”

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——The one who controls the intelligence, controls the battle.

Natsuki Subaru, who had grown up in modern-day Japan, poisoned by various game cultures, recognized that this saying was a formula of victory in modern-day warfare.

Even if that were not the case, victory in a game of poker in which the opponent had already seen one’s hand was impossible, a logic obvious to even children. Henceforth——

Julius: “If the opponent has seen our war potential, then I shall agree with your concern.”

Whilst leading the way, Julius narrowed his eyes and conveyed merely the caution in his words behind.

He shared the cognizance that not knowing the opponent’s moves was dangerous, after a brief explanation of the situation. Regardless, the thought of the balance being destroyed, on top of not knowing the opponent’s move, did not prevent him from keeping his head raised——

Beatrice: “Keeping important information a secret and it being found out later is much more scary, in fact. Subaru’s current idea is correct, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Really? It’s alright? You all don’t hate me?”

Beatrice: “Why are you so uneasy, in fact? It’s alright, I suppose. Nobody hates Subaru, in fact. Rather, everyone l-l-li…”

Subaru: “I get it, I get it. It’s alright, I’m relieved. I love you.”

Whilst holding hands and walking side-by-side, Subaru nodded at Beatrice as she tried to somehow encourage him. In fact, the speaker got far more embarrassed than the listener.

Words of love were much lighter on the one telling, than the one being told. There was no need to doubt one’s own feelings.

Subaru: “So, where’s Shaula!?”

Julius: “Ah, just a bit more… Over there.”

Dashing in front of everyone, Julius pointed towards a stone passage. Though the passage appeared to be a dead-end, a hidden sideway path was present on the right.

Lowering his hips, he followed Julius by passing under the wall, and his body then arrived outside of the Tower, welcomed by vehement winds filled with sand and sounds impossible to get accustomed to.

——That, sounded like an innumerable amount of glass shattering on Subaru’s ears all at once.

???: “Ah, hiyah hiyah hiyah yahyahyahyahyahyahyahyahyahyahyah~!!”

Subaru: "————"

That place was a space like a balcony installed on the wall of the Tower.

Though it was something he knew thanks to the enormous spiral staircase connecting to the lower floors, the Fourth Floor existed at a height far above several hundreds of meters.

Amidst the parched winds, dancing about in the lofty balcony was a stylish beauty with a long, lustrous braid——

Subaru: "——Shaula!"

Shaula: "Ah! Master, you've come here!? I'm so happy! My world stage, it feels like a workplace inspection! Since my esteemed tutor's come for inspection, take a good look and feast your eyes!"

Shaula replied to Subaru's shout with a dazzling voice, whilst he covered his eyes with his arm to protect them from the sandy wind. What she did with the same energy, was a fantasy difficult to believe in its own way.

For about the balcony's width, countless gunports had been deployed horizontally, generated in the air.

Gunports would be a slight bit of exaggeration, but there were no other words befitting it that he could think of. Gunports, muzzles, shooting portals—— in any case, they were openings for firing something, for sure.

The great white gunports, which had been installed through forming something akin to a magic square in the air, had their aims tilted diagonally towards the ground. And——

Shaula: "——*Mugen na Jigoku no Sogeki*[201]!!"

Subaru: "What the, that's so cool!!"

The moment Shaula shouted the technique's name, the white gunports glimmered brilliantly.

[201] Engrish flip. Means "Infinite Sniping of Hell (lit.)" (無限な地獄の狙撃), originally "インフィニティッド・ヘルズ・スナイプ" (Infinitied Hell's Snipe).

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Setowi (source)

The sound of shattering glass then repeatedly echoed through the sky of the Sand Dunes, quashing Subaru's howl. At the same time, the gunports lost their form and dissolved into the atmosphere.

This was the true identity of the high-pitched sound that had welcomed Subaru and the others upon their arrival at the balcony earlier. And, there was only one reason why Shaula was utilizing them.

——Firing bombardments as much as possible, the coronas approached the ground with the speed of light.

Upon making impact on the sand, they released a violent luster and blew away the ground. Same happened even when they stuck onto the backs of Witchbeasts rushing savagely atop the sand.

The Witchbeasts, which gave rise to a plume of sand as they aimed for the Tower, received the coronas on their backs, their blood and flesh scattering across the sand subsequently. The thirsting sand sipped their flesh, their scattered corpses were trampled by the other Witchbeasts, the coronas' carpet bombing magnificently and unmistakably reduced the total number of the Witchbeasts approaching.

The number of coronas was close to a hundred, and each aimed for and struck down two or three Witchbeasts.

This was what Shaula had fired in rapid succession within a short period of time. Also considering the interval when Julius went to call Subaru and the others, just how high a number would the total shots fired by her be.

However, against the horde of Witchbeasts which submerged the environs of the Tower like an army of ants, even Shaula's carpet bombardment only provided resistance bound to fall short eventually.

That was how large an obstacle were the numbers of the Witchbeasts gathering at the Sand Dunes.

Subaru: "Hey, hey, hey… I don't really want to hear about it, but no way…"

"Anastasia": "From this balcony, only a single direction from the Tower is visible. However, the same scenery also spreads on the other side of the Tower as well. That chain of thought is not wrong."

Subaru: "It's also possible that, it's only this side of the Tower that's been painted with luring sugared water, you know."

Beatrice: “If there’s someone who actually did such an idiotic antic, then Betty will slap them with full force, I suppose.”

Sound of unending tremors, and wriggling black lumps underneath.

Hearing that they were approaching the Tower from all directions, Subaru was on the verge of collapsing due to this overwhelming reality. Digressing, he also wished to object to the appearance of the Witchbeasts visible from afar.

Far too grotesque, ominous, inexplicable, a C-minus grade design by God.

Shaula: “What do you think, Master! Did you see my great service!? Also, that angle from behind was an *aji*[202] for Master. What did you think about that as well!?”

Subaru: “You, such an unwavering nature even in this situation, it’s amazing, I ordinarily admire it! Since you seem the type on whom complimenting the process instead of the result works better, well, what can I say, it was totally great! *Iikasa*[203]! Also, no matter which angle you decide on, I don’t have the leeway to be looking around, so keep concentrating and let’s go!”

Shaula: “Okay Google! Defense! Offense!”[204]

The truth was, he bowed before Shaula’s unwavering spirit. Whilst throwing words rather iffy for being encouragement, he also felt guilty seeing Shaula respond gallantly.

He wanted to reward her once this battle ended safely, but——

Subaru: “First comes overcoming this place, that’s top priority…! Meili!”

Meili: “I know, no neeeed to shout like that. But…”

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[202] Engrish flip. Means “appeal/charm” (味), originally “アピール” (appeal).

[203] Engrish flip. Means “nice quantity” (いいかさ), originally “ナイスバルク” (nice bulk). Yes, it sounds stupid but I have no idea what Subaru is even trying to say.

[204] This is as-is in the Japanese. Shaula is indeed referencing Google Voice functions and speaking Engrish all throughout.

Subaru: “But!? But what!? «But, would you be fine if I fully annihilated the Witchbeaaasts?», is that what you mean to say? Ah, it’s completely fine, rather, I request you to do that!”

Meili: “Don’t have such cocky expectations, okaaay. Even I won’t be able to cope with thiiis many bad animal-chans.”

Meili looked down from the balcony with both her hands clenching her ears with a sullen expression.

Alongside, she ignored Subaru’s irrational hopes and touched her lovable, young profile. And, licking her somewhat glossy, pink lips,

Meili: “——That’s why, I’ll make the children I had prepared move and strike them ha~rd.”

???: “——KRUAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!”

With that declaration Meili pointed her hand towards the ground and simultaneously, a huge mass jumped up, seeming as if the Sand Dunes had exploded.

From a point so distant that even the enormous Witchbeasts appeared to be tiny specs, the existence which had broken through the ground was clearly visible.

In other words, it meant that it was an appropriately gigantic existence—— With a total size of about twenty or thirty meters, a gigantic earthworm appeared and crushed the surrounding Witchbeasts with its frame.

Subaru: “That one’s…”

Meili: “I figured that it may be needed, so I kept it tamed and prepared. To be honest, I was intending to run away silently, but running away in this kind of a place would be a faiiilure.”

With the gigantic earthworm before their eyes, Meili showed her tongue whilst Subaru gulped.

Unfortunately, Subaru’s astonishment was not directed towards the earthworm itself, but to the fact that he had memories of that earthworm. That was the Witchbeast which Subaru had encountered once upon attempting to escape from the Tower.

Thinking back to it, Subaru had also been victim to the earthworm, which jumped out altogether from the underground.

What was also in the nook of his memories was that the earthworm had been blasted away by a white luster.

So Meili had been behind the earthworm, and Shaula had been behind the white light.

Tasting surprise and startlement upon the delayed convincement, with a bitter expression Subaru reached for Meili's head, with his hand and patted it rather forcefully, as the latter acted worse than she really was; a movement which she was unable to dodge, for how sudden it was.

Meili: "Wah, ah, heeey!"

Subaru: "I don't know if it's just your nature or your habit, but you don't have to act villainous. I'll never believe that you tried to run away leaving us all behind, anyways."

Meili: "Hmm, how can you say something like thaaat?"

Subaru: "That's, 'cause I am you and you are me, everyone's different and everyone's nice, probably."

Meili: "Huh?"

Meili stood there with an expression of failing to comprehend, and neither did Subaru intend to make her understand.

Ultimately, Subaru, at the present stage, was able to see through the entirety of the deceit in Meili's words. For he had once inspected and read through the memories of her dead self as something which was his own.

Considering she had not had a change in her sense of values while in the Tower, at the very least, he could surely speak to her like he understood her.

And, while keeping his hand on Meili's head, who groaned "Ugh" in displeasure, Subaru directed his consciousness towards the outbreaking situation at the present point in time—— and the commonness of the happenings in the former loops.

The Witchbeasts advancing in great numbers perhaps coincided with the previous situation of having the flaming Centaurs inside the Tower, their transgression permitted. In other words, the incident of the Witchbeasts being allowed to invade the Tower itself had also happened last time. It had been Julius to put up a fierce fight in order to drive them out.

In that case, had Shaula been dealing with the Witchbeasts from the exterior of the Tower like she was doing this time?

And since she was not sufficient by herself, the result was that the Witchbeasts' invasion had been permitted.

However, the same would not happen this time.

They now had an advantage at their side which made a huge difference compared to last time when it came to this large horde of Witchbeasts.

That was Meili's existence—— the very girl who had lost her life unintentionally at Subaru's hands last time was the existence who possessed the key to open through the deadlock of this situation.

Subaru: "If Meili fights the Witchbeasts alongside Shaula, then the situation will change. Does that mean Julius's hands will be open? If that's so, then…"

——It would be possible to use the war potential named Julius, to deal with a separate problem.

Subaru: "————"

The instant that thought dawned upon Subaru, he understood that it was essential to direct the required personnel to their required positions, for dealing with the various problems that were occurring simultaneously in the Tower.

——The large horde of Witchbeasts covering the Sand Dunes.

——The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, who would launch an attack on the Tower.

——The titanic scorpion which would wander around the Tower like it owned the place.

——The colossal black shadow which would swallow not only the Tower, but the Sand Dunes as well.

——And Reid Astrea, who would eventually start walking around the Tower as he pleased.

Subaru: “Our war potential would be me and Beatrice, Emilia-chan and Ram. Meili with Shaula, and Echidna with Julius…”

“Anastasia”: “Additionally, two ground dragons and the healing Spirit of the Green Room, how about counting them too? It will only be an advantage to think of them as choices, I believe.”

Echidna shrugged her shoulders before Subaru, who was counting the strength of their side and the enemy’s on his fingers. Nodding in response to her words, Subaru decided to include Patrasche and the powerful healing Spirit in the lower floors among the cards in their hand.

Just as Echidna had said, it was not a situation in which they could afford to spare any hands.

Subaru tilted his head, since the inclusion of all available cards was necessary, it was also necessary to fulfill their conditions for victory.

Even in that sense, he wanted to have a grasp on the positions of all his comrades, such that he could reach them——

Subaru: “——Hey, wait a second. No matter what, they’re way too late, aren’t they?”

Everyone: “————”

Subaru: “Emilia-chan and Ram went to the Green Room just to check on Rem and the others, right?”

Subaru tasted the sensation of having his throat parched, upon the delay in uniting with the two female comrades who were not here.

The Green Room was on the Fourth Floor, the same floor Subaru and the others were on. There was also the possibility that they would not know of this place, and therefore gotten lost in the Tower.

Julius: “This is how it is. If they are unaware of our location, then Miss Ram would surely use some way and find us. Otherwise, Emilia-sama is expected to break the wall and show herself.”

Subaru: “Ram aside, the hell’s with your evaluation of Emilia-chan. There’s no way she’d break a wall with those adorable, slender arms of hers. Even if she does, she doesn’t have that kind of personality, right?”

Beatrice: “That you’ve lost confidence on it is enough proof of that, in fact. But, Betty also has a bad feeling about this, I suppose.”

Subaru: “——Hk! Shaula! Meili! Can I leave this place to you!?”

Gaining Julius and Beatrice’s approval, Subaru called out to Shaula and Meili. Upon hearing that, Shaula, who was busy piling up the deployment and firing of even more gunports of light, gave a thumbs-up, and Meili brushed away her braid and puffed her chest.

Shaula: “Leave this place to me and go on ahead!”

Meili: “If this keeps up, I’ll do whatever I caaan. I won’t let it pass by if you don’t come back with onee-san and the others all saaafe.”

With Shaula saying the line he had always wanted to say at the best possible moment, and discovering a side of Meili which allowed them to rely upon her, Subaru nodded towards Beatrice and the rest, subsequently breaking into a sprint.

Diving through the wall, he slid onto the aisle,

Subaru: “Even though Meili and Shaula are holding out, what’s the possibility of the Witchbeasts penetrating into the Tower?”

“Anastasia”: “It is not as if it is not possible, but the underground sand chamber we fell into… Right, Natsuki-kun does not remember it. There was the possibility of entering the Tower from there. But, thanks to Meili-kun, that is…”

Subaru: “When the Earthworm was raging about, the underground collapsed?”

“Anastasia”: “The subterranean tunnel had a fork in the way. I doubt it would have managed to withstand it in terms of strength.”

Subaru clenched his fists upon Echidna’s affirmation.

In other words, the doubly beneficial existence of Meili had held the Witchbeasts' stampede back. It was possible to have plenty of defense to ensure they did not enter either from the ground or the underground.

If the large horde of Witchbeasts had been dealt with, then that would leave four of the five major problems.

Though the path ahead was still daunting, what was important was that one of them had been overcome.

After overcoming those five perilous paths——

Subaru: "By us, this Tower has to be…"

Captured, but immediately subsequent to him having that word on the tip of his tongue, something happened.

???: "——Barusu!!"

Subaru: "——Hk! Ram!?"

Dashing towards the Green Room, he raised his face towards the voice which had reached the other side of the aisle. Upon observing, rushing fiercely towards Subaru's group of four was a black shadow—— Patrasche.

Clinging onto the back ofhe ground dragon with sharp looks was Ram, sleeping Rem's body tightly embraced in her slender arms.

Subaru: "Ram! Patrasche and Rem as well, are you alright!?"

Ram: "Yes, somehow, you see. Ram had a mountain of problems in the time Barusu was dozing off. How can you even sleep in this situation. Stand up immediately."

Subaru: "I'm sorry! Both of you sisters, don't reproach me! Look, I'm properly standing! I'm running!"

Nimbly dismounting from the ground dragon's back, with Rem still on the saddle, Ram's cutting eloquence struck him.

Since her words happened to be similar to those of Rem's when she had gone off like an explosion in his dream, a weird thought appeared in his mind; they were sisters not just by looks.

Ram: "——? While Barusu's odd attitude is concerning, now is not the time for that."

Upon hearing Subaru's words, Ram briefly furrowed her eyebrows, but immediately turned her head back and diverted her attention towards the rear.

That was, towards the aisle she just came from—— the direction where the Green Room laid.

Subaru also felt uneasy about Ram having brought only Patrasche and Rem with her, and not Emilia who was supposed to be with her.

Subaru: "Ah, I also have things I have to ask about and tell you about. You, were supposed to be with…"

Ram: "——On the other side of the aisle, Ram came across an opponent who named himself the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony."

Subaru: "————"

Declared Ram with absolute clarity, slashing down his question.

Daunted by the strength of those words, Subaru, along with Beatrice and Julius, sealed their mouths tight. Thus the one to respond in their stead was Echidna, who had been shaken the least.

Echidna: "You just said the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, right? Are they on the other side of the aisle?"

Ram: "Yes, that is correct—— And, someone is battling that Sin Archbishop of Gluttony."

Subaru: "…Someone?"

An explanation that let off a strange impression, more and more.

Ram's words did not change, brimming with ambition and confidence, and the existence of unintelligible portions itself yielded a terribly far-reaching unease.

When Subaru pressed those unintelligible portions, Ram nodded with a "Yes".

She nodded, and said.

Ram: “——An unknown person of silver hair is clashing with the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony. Even right now, after telling Ram and the others to escape.”

Arc 6 Chapter 64 – The Second Obstacle

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 4 “Five Obstacles”, Part 3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——*An unknown person, of silver hair.*

Subaru: “Huh?”

That unexpected expression from Ram yielded a faint gap in Subaru’s consciousness.

Had it simply been “A person of silver hair”, it would have already been quite the roundabout way of putting it, but it surely would not have allowed Subaru to have any such feelings of oddity.

There was no question that Emilia was a possessor of beautiful silver hair. Her amethyst eyes were also beautiful. Her face and all other parts constituting her body were so cute, seemingly a piece of art made by God himself.

However, merely that one unnecessary “unknown” changed the implications of what had been stated largely.

Subaru: “An unknown person, of silver hair…”

Ram: “Yes, that’s right. Someone who had never been seen in this Tower before. At the very least, that person did not seem to have hostility towards us… Seeing the situation, Ram retreated for the moment. But…”

Julius: “——Whoever joins in as reinforcement matters not, but that matter takes a different aspect given their opponent is Gluttony.”

Nodding in response to Subaru's whispers, Ram turned her eyes towards the direction she came from. Taking over Ram's words whilst making a grim expression due to the unrest caused by the sound of the word "Gluttony", was Julius.

Tightly pursing his lips, he touched the Knight's sword attached to his waist.

Julius: "Though it is an unforeseen encounter, now that they have shown themselves here as enemies, they cannot be allowed to escape. Our goal was to find a way to negate the damage brought about by the Sin Archbishops of Gluttony and Lust in the first place. If they themselves have appeared, then we simply need to hear it from their own mouths."

Ram: "Agreed. Ram too, has no intentions of letting him return alive. For he must be made to regret coming here so carefreely."

Subaru: "W-wait! Wait a second! I understand your eagerness! I understand but…!"

Whilst the two displayed their hostility towards Gluttony, Subaru thoughtlessly called for a pause.

Julius, who'd had the existence known as himself erased from the world, and Ram, who had gotten her beloved younger sister thoroughly devoured away from her own heart—— he understood the two's motivation for defeating Gluttony was quite high. The truth was such that Subaru felt opportunities both good and bad had arrived at the same time.

But, the problem here was——

Subaru: "In your entire conversation, there was no mention of Emilia's name. What's up with that?"

Everyone: "————"

Feeling a bad premonition about it, Subaru fired his doubt straightforwardly.

Ram's unnatural manner of speech, and the lacking response from Julius and Beatrice with regards to Emilia. Upon turning his line of sight, he noticed even Beatrice and Echidna did not wear expressions which would come from sensing something odd.

They had accepted Ram's comment about "An unknown person of silver hair" as is.

Ram: “——Emilia… Who is that?[205]”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

As Ram tilted her neck without concealing any of her doubts, Subaru’s throat was parched in surprise.

Upon observing, Julius and Beatrice, even Echidna were looking at him with an expression of incomprehension in their eyes—— He was unable to conceal its impact.

Subaru: “I mean…”

Things were at a level which would make one think just what had happened in the interval of a single minute.

Prior to things reaching this level Subaru had been talking about Emilia with Julius and the others. First of all, the reason why they had dashed from the balcony into the interior of the Tower was due to the concern caused by Emilia and Ram not joining up with them and wishing for their safety.

How did that, in the matter of a single instant——

Beatrice: “——Subaru, could it be…”

Suddenly Beatrice, who was holding Subaru’s hand, changed her expression as if having noticed something. The first one to notice was Beatrice, but the rest of the members all subsequently had their expressions changed as if having guessed correctly as well.

They immediately came to realize that the name Subaru had mentioned, the name which did not exist in their memories, was one that held great significance to them.

Beatrice: “Emilia… Is that the name of that silver-haired girl?”

Subaru: “——That’s right. If there was a girl of silver hair, then that’s the girl named Emilia, a comrade of ours. That’s why she told Ram to escape and stayed there herself. She’s fighting even right now.”

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[205] A bit of a fun detail, but the structure of the entire line in Japanese, 「——エミリアって、誰のこと？」 is exactly the same as the moment at the end of Arc 3 with Rem, 「——レムって、誰のこと？」. The sentence is translated slightly differently compared to its usual, “Who’s X?”, to match up with the Japanese structure a bit better.

Julius: “l believe something like that may occur. None other than I myself, have tasted that feeling.”

Subaru: “————”

Responding to Subaru’s strengthless answer, Julius touched his bangs as if having heard something difficult to believe.

Julius made no effort to conceal his astonishment, but Subaru also once again felt the extent of the reach of Gluttony’s power, its immediate effectivity, its atrocious and fiendish nature, and sensed its true fearsomeness.

Speaking honestly, though Subaru was aware of the fact that his memories had been stolen, his experience of its real feeling was rather weak.

Of course, upon the disappearance of his memories, misunderstandings and suspicions came forth; his negative emotions towards Emilia and the others were difficult to forget, an act of dark history which, if possible, he would like to forget for eternity.

But, even still, his real feeling of it was weak. The act of searching for something which never existed upon feeling that it had indeed existed, was an battle of uncertainty, akin to fishing in a wide ocean on a night with zero visibility.

Hence why his real feeling of it was faint. But, that was not all.

Forgetting Emilia, the person whom they remembered a moment ago, the comrade whom they had undergone numerous hardships with—— Was there anything at all more fearsome than that?

Usurper of memories, trampler of reminiscences, devourer of bonds was Gluttony, and these were its habitual crimes.

Having finally witnessed it personally, Subaru came to understand.

Gluttony were villains who only cared for their own joyfulness, who trespassed and raided into territories which should never be laid a finger on.

Ram: “——Uh, kuh.”

Subaru: “Ram!?”

And, Subaru somehow digested the astonishment. In front of him, amongst the members shocked regarding the theft of their memories of a comrade, Ram suddenly knelt down on that very spot.

Beside Patrasche, leaning against the feet of the black dragon, Ram exhaled out a rough breath.

Subaru: “What happened? Are you alright?”

Ram: “…Ram’s head, just hurts a bit. Upon thinking about that, unknown person.”

Subaru: “About Emilia…?”

Subaru wrinkled his forehead with his eyebrows in response to Ram, who had her hand on the head and made an expression faced with adversity.

Possibly, if Gluttony had robbed away the memories of Emilia, Ram must have witnessed that scene with her own eyes. Subaru wondered, if that was having its effect.

However, Beatrice voiced out “Subaru”, with stiffened shoulders as she shook her head,

Beatrice: “It’s better to stop trying to remind about it anymore, in fact. It’s too absent, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Too absent, you say…”

Beatrice: “The sloven part of the Authority of Gluttony is showing itself, in fact—— The parts where the stolen person has not been established as absent from memories are too many, which leads to parts of discrepancies, I suppose.”

Subaru: “————”

Hearing Beatrice’s words, Subaru had been rendered speechless for a moment.

However, he immediately swallowed its implication and understood its meaning.

The Authority of Gluttony was exercised, and memories of Emilia disappeared from Ram and the others.

Ram's position was that of Emilia's caretaker—— otherwise said, a master-servant relationship. In their bond, though difficult to explain, there was a certain warmth both of them felt for each other.

With that erased entirely, born was a vacuum in the place where the existence of "Emilia" should have been within Ram.

Memories were akin to something like articles of reminiscences kept inside a drawer.

Normally one would not be conscious of their presence there, but upon opening the drawer when trying to remember, what one would witness was a variety of things—— If that were not so, then life would not come into existence.

In other words, should Ram search for Emilia's name within herself here, she would be doing something equivalent to the fatiguing work of opening the drawer endlessly and failing to find it.

"Anastasia": "I shall look after her."

Subaru: "Echidna…?"

Beside Ram, who had distorted her expression in agony, Echidna stood next to her, and spoke so with her hand raised. Subaru looked at her with surprise and subsequently Echidna shrugged her slender shoulders,

"Anastasia": "Right now, we do not possess the time to be arguing and discussing. All the more when Gluttony has arrived, and one of our comrades has gotten their Name stolen and is continuing to fight. We must not halt our feet."

Julius: "Echidna, please take care of Miss Ram and her younger sister. Please distance away from the battle along with Patrasche."

"Anastasia": "Yes, leave it to me—— Julius, this is a do-or-die situation, but make sure you do not heat up."

Julius: "I know. My fighting spirit has grown cold quite a bit. Just like this sword."

Julius immediately accepted Echidna's suggestion and turned his dignified gaze towards the front. He brimmed with such keen fighting spirit, enough to make Subaru be at a loss for words.

Subaru: “Ram.”

Ram: “Though frustrating, even if Ram goes, Ram will only get in the way. Leave me behind and go. However, please spare Gluttony’s life. Everything besides that part is for Barusu.”

Subaru: “Sounds like you’re talking about beef or pork[206], but anyway, don’t worry. We’re going!”

Ram: “——Yes, please succeed.”

Leaving behind Ram, who had a frustrated expression, Subaru nodded towards Echidna who would stay with them. He then caressed Patrasche’s neck before commencing his sprint and looked at the side profile of the sleeping beauty atop its back.

Subaru: “————”

Unchanging, silent, breathing so faint as if she were not breathing, Rem’s eyes remained closed, witnessing an eternal dream.

For now, this was fine. He had already received the words he should have from her. What remained was——

Subaru: “Just you wait, Gluttony…! I’m fed up with letting you eat any more!”

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——In all honesty, that doubt continued to come to his mind ceaselessly.

Why did the effect of the Authority of Gluttony not show on Subaru?

Even after Emilia’s Name had been robbed, and she disappeared from the memories of Beatrice, Ram and the others, Emilia’s Name, form, voice continued to exist clearly within Subaru.

[206] The way Ram is referring to “part” here is much like one would refer to a specific cut of meat (部位), which doesn’t translate well to English. That’s why Subaru mentions beef and pork here.

The fleeting feelings he held for her were still present within his chest, unforgettably.

Subaru: “Is it because I came from a different world…?”

Because of that, this world’s rules may not affect Subaru.

If the memories of this world were records of life which got chipped away from the souls of the dead in the Hall of Memories, then the fact that Gluttony’s power of snatching and usurping them did not apply to Subaru was possibly because he was an exception, because he hailed from a different world; that was perhaps a possibility.

In that case, would the memories of “Natsuki Subaru” also be etched into this world’s Hall of Memories were he to die, even if temporarily? Or perhaps——

Subaru: “——Am I Returning by Death, because I can’t do that?”

That coldhearted conclusion which he arrived at, was one that made him shudder.

If that was the answer to the question of the mechanism of Subaru’s Return by Death, then Subaru’s life would follow an endless spiral of living in this world.

To summarize, it meant that he would spend decades and decades in this world, unable to die from even ageing.

If Subaru were to complete his life with this rule not being applicable to him, perhaps he had to do so in a world in which Natsuki Subaru could truly deposit his memories——

???: “——Ice Brand Arts!!”

Subaru: “——Hk!?”

That instant, his consciousness, drowned within thoughts, was slashed up by the sharp voice of a silver bell.

What stretched before the on-rushing Subaru, who was sprinting with his head raised—— the aisle which led to the Green Room was frozen white, and he was welcomed by the feeling of a dreadfully icy wind upon his skin.

And its origin was a fairy of snow moving her body as if dancing within the fluttering diamond dust—— so it seemed, but it was actually Emilia, her silver hair fluttering.

Emilia: "——Yah! Hiyah! Hi! Yah!"

Swinging around the twin swords of ice in her hands, Emilia unleashed a fierce attack whilst raising her voice. Her yell somewhat had a sense of dejection to it, however her velocity was not lacking whatsoever, as she sprinted with swords of ice.

The blades evidently launched a blow onto the confronting enemy, and tried to end it with a single strike.

Subaru: "That's…"

And as Emilia fluttered and danced about with the ice swords in her hands, her environs, the aisle which had become her battlefield had been frozen a bluish-white, a transformation which gave the impression that this was a world entirely different from the Tower in the desert.

Perhaps this was the effect of the ice magic utilized by Emilia having stretched onto her surroundings. As if this was an extraordinarily powerful power even in this world, Beatrice and Julius inhaled upon laying their eyes on it.

However, greater than that was——

???: "Ahhhaha~! You're doing it, you sure are doing it, aren't you doing it, you're really doing it, it seems you're doing it, because you can do it, because you're doing it! It's something we've eaten too~!"

Confronting Emilia, whilst warding off the hurled ice swords lightly and casually, an existence, laughing and sneering, was pronounced and prominent.

???: "————"

That had been a young boy, with long, dark-brown hair waving about freely, expressing a smile dyed with melancholic insanity.

His age in his teens, his outfit shabby, it had even started losing color in some spots. He did not appear healthy or clean whatsoever, but what was utmost repulsive about him was the glint in his eye, having

limitlessly scorned others, turning them into food without any hesitation, a glint in which a glimpse of despair and longing for life could be seen.

It could be understood at a single glance. There was no need to even mention it.

The reality that there was an existence aside from Louis Arneb with such eyes, was intolerable.

Subaru: "——Sin Archbishop of Gluttony!"

Gluttony: "Ahha~! Customers! Well, nope! It's the *jyuyouryouri*[207], onii-san! We had also been eagerly waiting to meet you. Seems like you looked after our little sister, isn't it!"

Hearing Subaru's roar, having brushed off Emilia's sword strikes, Gluttony intensified his evil smile. Dreadfully remembering that ominous smile, Emilia also noticed Subaru and the others behind her, letting out a surprised voice saying "Eh!",

Emilia: "Ah, everyone! Um, you may not know about me, but that's the enemy! The bad guy! Leave this place to me… Though you may not know about me!"

Subaru: "————"

Emilia had correctly grasped the situation she had been placed into, in regards to the existence of the comrades behind her.

Of course, she must have received a shock as her memories had vanished from others. With only the fact that she had been forgotten in mind due to that shock, she had not taken Subaru into account, who had never experienced forgetting someone like that.

However, not only had she firmly allowed Ram to escape, she was looking out for Subaru and others who had rushed to this place whilst continuing to battle Gluttony like this.

A flood of emotions, and Subaru shouted.

Subaru: "It's alright, Emilia-chan! I haven't forgotten!"

[207] Engrish flip. Means "main dish/course" (主要料理), originally "メインディッシュ" (main dish).

Emilia: “————”

Subaru: “I won’t forget you anymore, I swear! No matter what happens, I won’t forget you!”

Tossing his fist up, Subaru so conveyed towards Emilia’s back.

The instant upon hearing it, Emilia’s eyes twinkled wide, but then straitened a moment later.

Emilia: “————”

Subaru was unaware what emotions must have bloomed within her mind at that moment.

However, it was certain that those emotions were not related to anything negative, judging from her minute smile.

At the same pace, Emilia clashed with Gluttony head-on, heaving the ice twin swords and then drawing out a lance of ice from the floor, dancing about with moves of ice and pursuing the enemy.

Julius: “Surely, you do not realize the extent of the affect your words had on her just now.”

Subaru: “Ah?”

He heard Julius spill those words with a smile right beside him. His words sounded like they possessed an extremely deep meaning; Julius refrained from responding to Subaru after he turned around.

However, he drew out and assumed the sword on his waist, having sketched a clean path. And——

Julius: “There’s no need to even ask, but she is on our side, correct, Subaru?”

Subaru: “Yeah, that’s right. No way she’d be our enemy with that cuteness!”

Julius: “——I understand.”

Julius’s form, as he responded with a nod, faded from the edge of his vision—— No, that was an illusion.

The very next instant, accelerating with a single step, Julius flew into the melee of ice and his piercing strike captured Gluttony, the latter with both arms crossed in front of his chest, as he took a gigantic leap behind.

Gluttony: “Whoops~, onii-san’s…”

Julius: “I have been eagerly awaiting this moment, Gluttony——!”

Julius’s sharp strike of the sword drilled into the faintly smiling Gluttony with force. However, Gluttony killed and nullified the impact by jumping backward on his own volition, and knelled his throat after positioning his feet on the frozen wall, a gesture filled with gloom and sadness.

After that, Gluttony let his lengthy tongue peek through provocatively,

Gluttony: “Oioi, don’t charge and bump in like thiiis. Sorry, but we and us don’t share everything that got eaten, you seeee. We don’t remember seeing onii-san. Doesn’t that mean that not us, but Roy’s the one to blame?”

Julius: “——Hk.”

Gluttony: “Well, guess you can also think there isn’t much of a difference. Regardless, Roy aside, we don’t really have much interest in onii-san, eeeh. Feels like it doesn’t match up to our eating standards?”

Julius: “Eating standards, you say?”

Gluttony: “Ah, yeahyeah. That’s…”

Hanging both of his hands down languidly, Gluttony had fixed the daggers attached around his wrists. Viewing Julius, he tried to recite in a terribly ominous style. However——

Emilia: “Hiya—— Hk!!”

Gluttony: “——Hk!?”

Over there, by swinging both of her hands down, Emilia cast an ice floe.

Her sole strike mercilessly submerged the aisle easily, with a range seemingly unsuited for battle, paying special attention to make sure that the strike allowed no way to escape.

Sensing it in the midst of the conversation, Gluttony changed his expression and dove under and through the ice floe and succeeded in surviving.

Gluttony: “Tch! It’s something we knew because we ate it, but you really aren’t hesitating, are youuu, Emilia! If you attack like that, what if you start being thought of as a scary person…”

Emilia: “It’s fine, so keep quiet! You must be aware that I’m used to being thought of as a scary person, right! What’s important is how I think of everyone! Besides…”

Emilia plunged a fair knee towards Gluttony’s face, who had dived through the ice floe, his breaths ragged. Gluttony took them with his arm, and jumped backwards upon the nullified impact.

With that, Emilia looked back onto Subaru whilst finishing her words with a valiant smile,

Emilia: “The person I wished would remember the most did remember. I’m feeling reaaally good right now!”

Gluttony: “This is why the *tagui*[208] which moves by feelings isn’t our strong point. It’s the *tagui* we don’t go well with the most.”

Julius: “——Is that so. However, I am in agreement with her.”

Gluttony distorted his cheeks in annoyance, and Julius’s tall figure slid behind him. A decapitating strike slashed down, and Gluttony accepted that with a sudden backwards swing of his arm.

However, his parry was faulty, and he was unable to stop the strike completely, slashing deeply just before his elbow. The consecutive strikes resumed upon Gluttony’s cries of ache——

Julius: “——Having been completely forgotten by everything once, I also felt that by losing my own footing I had been denied life, but from the very beginning I had no need to be puzzled over the place where I stand.”

Gluttony: “Tch! Ugh, g-giyah!”

Putting his quiet determination into words, the sword strikes Julius was firing increased gradually.

[208] Engrish flip. Means “kind/sort/type” (たぐい), originally “タイプ” (type).

Unable to fully accept them, Gluttony's wounds gradually increased and, finally receiving a decent blow on his chest, he let out a shriek.

Beatrice: "Subaru."

Subaru: "I know. I won't jump into it."

Beatrice: "…It's alright if you know that, in fact."

Julius resumed his fierce attack, whilst Emilia also launched a merciless strike towards Gluttony. On the other hand, Gluttony was on the defensive, intercepting the two's attacks.

Of course, Subaru also wanted to join in and assist in cornering Gluttony if possible, but it was extremely clear to him that he did not possess the ability to do so.

Right here and right now, he had no choice but to watch and believe that there would come a moment when the combination of Emilia and Julius will defeat Gluttony. However——

Gluttony: "You're quite doing it for a hurriedly constructed *combo*[209]! But, how about thiiis?"

Emilia: "What?"

Gluttony: "——Ice Brand Arts."

Despite continuing to bleed, Gluttony did not erase his smile of leeway, and whispered so whilst facing downwards with a sorrowful tone. Upon hearing that whisper, Subaru and Emilia raised their eyebrows in astonishment. Unable to comprehend its meaning, Beatrice and Julius furrowed their eyebrows. However, all four of them stood stunned at the spectacle which followed.

The following moment, a lance of ice shot up from Gluttony's feet, and Julius evaded it by turning sideways instantly, whilst Emilia transformed the lance of ice in her hands into an ice hammer and blocked it through forceful destruction.

[209] Technically this is Engrish albeit it's "combi" (コンビ) rather than "combo", but there really isn't a good Japanese alternative to the expression "combination (of people)".

However, even if they had avoided a single attack, that did not mean that they had not been surprised and caught off-guard, forced to switch from offense to defense.

Gluttony: “Haha! How does it feel to have your own signature move be eaten, huuuh? How is it, how does it, just how is it, well how is it, how would it be, how will it have to be, how must it be, how does it have to be is what we’re saying, how does it feel is what we’re saying, gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!”

Emilia: “——Hk! Suddenly…”

Julius: “His movements changed!?”

So voiced Emilia and Julius in astonishment, as before them Gluttony drew out weapons of ice from the floor. Upon witnessing the armament of ice difficult to model, Subaru inhaled. For that was——

Subaru: “E-Excalibur!?”

Gluttony: “Even if Ice Brand Arts itself is Emilia’s move, the one reconstructing it is us, who ate onii-san, you see~! Knowledge is weaponry! We are a *chishigijin*[210] Sin Archbishop.”

Whilst saying so, Gluttony lunged down the holy sword of ice he had reconstructed himself, and struck a brilliant decapitating slash towards Emilia and Julius. Of course, it was a weapon which had only its appearance reconstructed through ice, and nothing like light energy was being released from it.

However, keeping to a tempo, Gluttony produced weapons which did not exist within this different world in succession, and cornered Emilia and Julius into disadvantage, who had been struck by surprise.

Of course, Emilia immediately took her stance again, abandoning the initial impact and tried to mount a counterattack against Gluttony, however, Gluttony changed his battling style as if a different person entirely, and the situation of the battle persisted with them attempting to respond to it, yet being cornered into disadvantage.

Subaru: “————”

[210] Engrish flip. Means “intellectual” (知識人), originally “インテリ” (intellectual).

Witnessing Gluttony's offense and defense, Subaru learnt the menace that was the Memories of a plurality of people being taken in.

Emilia's technique of successively producing weapons of ice was sufficiently strong by itself, but once the user's power of imagination was appended to it, it morphed into a technique that displayed an entirely different side. The weapons reconstructed from the knowledge of another world brought by Subaru specifically, were extraordinarily problematic.

Although not in this world, there existed a mountain of armaments which had suitable practicality. This was the fault of Subaru's guilty history, as he had been absorbed in reading books about weapons of the past and the present, the east and the west, back when he had been in junior high-school.

On top of that, Gluttony had likely captured a large number of warriors within himself during his life until this point, and resultantly, he had ceaselessly, incessantly installed the fighting strength of countless combatants.

Henceforth, by merely hauling out the optimum Memories from the stock, he transformed into an expert of that weapon instantaneously, piling up offense and defense at will.

And, there was one more cause behind Emilia and Julius's inferior position.

Emilia: "Julius! Not there!"

Julius: "Kuh… Hk."

Julius's painful stepping overlapped with Emilia's shriek.

The cooperation between them for taking down a single menacing enemy was crude.

Emilia and Julius, their compatibility with each other when it came to cooperation was not good.

It was also largely impacted by the fact that Emilia was on the "feeling side", as her fighting style relying on senses, whilst Julius was on the "technique side", having stacked training and discipline.

However, if the problem of the two's abilities were solved, then the problem would be how plausible would it be for them to know and adapt to each other's habits.

Indeed, if they got to know each other's habits, should the two establish a relationship between them.

Gluttony: "It sure is sad. Did you really think you could cooperate? Knowing, and trusting the partner for the time being, may lead to the same when it comes to results, but are totally different things in the end, no? You don't know their thoughts so you can't match them, you don't know their habits so you can't adapt to them. At last, you'll collide with one another and get in the way… hahaaa, that won't do won't dooo, you two!"

Emilia: "Kuh…"

Gluttony: "Knowledge is strength! Memories are bonds! By being offered reminiscences, we're high above! We're strong! We can flap wings to the highest, to the utmost, is what it means. you knooow!"

Jumping above, the kick unleashed by Gluttony captured the two at the same time.

He still had a petite build and his legs were not too lengthy, yet his soles and heels placed a firm, powerful hit on the two's shoulders with absolute perfection, and instantly blew both of them back to far away, sending them flying as they screeched in pain.

Meanwhile Gluttony somersaulted agilely, landing with his limbs on the icy floor, utterly dominating the battlefield.

Gluttony: "Troubles! Impertinence! Greatly difficult fighting! What do you think of these skills of ours, eh! Onii-san who's just watching from there too, are you satisfied by just tasting feelings of vexation, eh?"

Subaru: "You bastard…"

Gluttony: "You said something or the other about not forgetting or whatever, buuut, how much can someone with that worth even manage to save? In the end, experience ultimately determines everything. Accumulating excellent expertise is precisely what enriches life and turns people into winners. In other words, it's us who's the greatest, is what it means!"

Opening both of his arms, Gluttony laughed saying whatever he wished to as per his convenience, whilst unraveling his sharp fangs.

And precisely the words which Gluttony had recited were, indeed, his philosophy. Though slightly different from “the philosophy to attain joyfulness” which Louis, who was supposed to be his younger sister, had recited, it was the worst kind of ideology envisioning and intending to use the lives of others as a stepping stone for rising above and fattening oneself.

Subaru thought of it as an ideology which deserved to be utterly despised from the bottom of one’s heart——

???: “——Ya prick, the hell’re ya gettin’ all fired up for?”

Gluttony: “Wha?”

Subaru: “————”

Until that point, Gluttony had been laughing loudly, enjoying his heyday, but the instant upon hearing that voice, his eyes went wide. And, that surprise of his was shared by Subaru and the others.

Far too unexpectedly, carnage trespassed onto this place without any shame as if it were a matter-of-course.

Steadily, firmly treading upon the aisle of ice, casually dressed with one side exposed, it was the tall figure of a redhead. With a fiendish smile, he revealed his form from the other side of the aisle—— from a direction such that he directly faced Subaru and the others, with Gluttony interposed in-between. And——

???: “No goddamn way the greatest’d be a twisted with willpower kinda brat like ya. That’s ‘cause «greatest», «strongest», «best» ‘n «utmost» are all words saved for me.”

Saying so, standing there with a wicked smile was Reid Astrea, having descended from the Second Floor despite not being supposed to.

Arc 6 Chapter 65 - The Second, the Fifth, Followed by——

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 4 “Five Obstacles”, Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

Subaru: “————”

Majestic and undaunted, a red-haired great man had appeared in this place. Reid Astrea.

The unforeseen entrance of the man, his sharp blue eyes lacking any consideration for the other side’s surprise, his very presence caused everyone—— even Gluttony, to be at a loss for words.

Reid: “Oioi, the hell ya spacin’ out for, ya pricks. Is me bein’ here somethin’ so surprisin’, huh. It’s a matter-of-course, aye?”

And seeing Subaru and the others completely petrified, Reid struck his left eye covered under the eyepatch with a finger of his, and struck the sandals he was wearing onto the floor.

A gesture implicitly referring to the entire Tower,

Reid: “I wasn’t even able to take a nap ‘cause of all the damn noise happenin’ both outside and inside. It’s so borin’ that there ain’t even drinks here in the first place ‘n then this happens, no way I’d tolerate it.”

Subaru: “…That’s completely your own convenience, isn’t it. As you can see we’re busy here in our own way. Don’t make things more complicated.”

Reid: “Hah! Ya said somethin’, small fry? Sorry but yer voice’s so low I couldn’t hear a thin’. Well, even if I could hear it, I’d still say I couldn’t hear it.”

Subaru: “Your shitty stubbornness sure is shitty…”

And what was nasty was not merely his stubbornness, but also his timing.

Too weak to blame him, not enough substance to protest him. Subaru, stumped by his violent and relentless words, realized that he was feeling afraid of Reid and tightened his fists.

His soul, remembered the sense of defeat pertaining to Reid's existence.

That was not simply because of what all Reid had made him experience back when had been filled with suspicion. Even in the previous loop, he had faced Reid's repulsive audacity.

At that time, Subaru's heart was not supposed to have feared Reid this much.

But now, at this moment, why could he feel it peculiarly, unusually severely?

That was——

Subaru: "——Because my soul, clearly recognizes you as an enemy, is it?"

Reid: "Nice, small fry. Don't mean to raise yer status from that of a small fry, but I'll commend'cha for not misunderstandin' that I ain't any convenient backup."

Subaru: "Even if you said, «rejoice, I'm your backup», there's no way it'd be possible to accept such words coming from you in full."

Reid: "Hah! Ya sure said somethin'."

Unraveling his fangs in ferocity, Reid laughed like a shark whilst Subaru concealed the chills it sent down to his spine.

Reid's proclamation just now was also, in a certain way, a pronouncement of hopelessness. However, Subaru had never thought of Reid as something like an ally from the beginning.

That had merely been affirmed—— He had not been mistaken.

And upon the arrival of Subaru and Reid's exchange at a point where it paused——

Gluttony: "Well, saaay, Reid Astrea."

And so, the personage who had promptly returned to his true spirit, Gluttony, called out Reid's name.

Right at the center of the frozen aisle—— the insane Sin Archbishop was standing literally between Subaru's group and Reid, and upon being focused by that line of sight glinting with vicious emotions, Reid glared towards Gluttony, snorting his nose in displeasure.

Reid: "Oh, what is it, midget… What a filthy lil' midget. What is it, filthy midget-chan."

Gluttony: "You're the First Generation Sword Saint, aren't you? Then why are you here again, huuuh? According to our memories, you, the Examiner, shouldn't be able to come down from the upper floor, isn't that right?"

Ignoring his humiliating nickname and provocative efforts, Gluttony fired the question at Reid.

The Memories he had spoken of were clearly Subaru's Memories, which was quite infuriating, but Subaru and the others also shared the same question that he had raised.

——The arrival of Reid Astrea, the Examiner of the Second Floor, onto the Fourth Floor.

This was something Subaru had also witnessed in the previous loop, and had considered it as one of the five obstacles which must be cleared.

The trick behind the phenomenon of him freely walking within the Tower was entirely unknown. However, that phenomenon would only occur at this stage of the game—— Should it be said that he had been able to walk around all this time but simply chose not to, then the issue would be entirely different.

Gluttony: "Whether there's a peculiar trick behind it, or the *kimari*[211] of the Tower itself changed. Either way, you doing this is out of calculations, and we have no choice but to rethiiink the full course in a lot of ways. After having the appetizer is the *jyuyouryouri* and then the dessert, that's standard, you know. Right?"

Reid: "Don't ramble 'bout such incomprehensible bullshit, ya shitty filthy midget bastard."

[211] Engrish flip. Means "rule" (決まり), originally "ルール" (rule). "Course" (in the context of a full-course meal) and "dessert" here are both English loanwords as well, probably taken from Subaru's knowledge, but they don't really have equivalents in Japanese, so they stay as-is.

Gluttony: “————”

Reid: “I can’t come down? Brace yer eyes ‘n look, ya prick. Ya can understand the stupidity ya’re talkin’ ’bout by takin’ a look, aye, ya prick. Oi, ya over there.”

Whilst speaking, Reid pitched forward towards Gluttony in displeasure. His form, with his white fangs unraveled and glaring with a single eye was indeed like the natural style of a delinquent.

However, the pressure he himself exerted was incomparably more than those of delinquents who gathered in front of convenience stores, enough to make one feel their life threatened by simply its after-effects.

Should it be equated to something, then what was standing there was a beast which was the mixture of a tiger, a bear, a lion and a dragon all in a single body.

Clad in every possible hint of violence, Reid bared his fangs.

Reid: “Don’t joke ’round, ya prick. I’m doin’ whatever I wanna however I wanna. No way I’d accept someone’s instructions, ya prick. Don’t be jokin’ ’round, ya prick. First of all, right back at’cha, the hell’s up with’cha. Whose permission did’cha get to be makin’ a racket here. Oi, ya over there, ya prick.”

Gluttony: “Ahhahaaa, how amaziiing, how unbeaaarable, it’s impossible to get talkiiing.”

Turning the holy sword of ice he held in his hand into fragments of ice, Gluttony combed up his long bangs.

It seemed even Gluttony could not fare well with an opponent who was this difficult to get dialogue across to. Even with Emilia, someone with whom there was no use in arguing, there had been hints of struggling, but Reid was multiple levels above Emilia in terms of being difficult to converse with.

However, Gluttony, pertaining to the opponent this incompatible and resumed, spoke “Although”, and,

Gluttony: “As prey iiit’s the finest quality. Our appetite, as Gourmet is starting to crave binging! Eat it away! Chew it up! Lick it all! Attain the flavor! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!”

Roaring, maddening in excitement and ferocity, Gluttony positioned his limbs onto the frozen floor and glared at Reid.

Making his lengthy tongue peek through his white canines, as per the command of the aberrant "appetite" which indulged in the memories of others, impossible to be understood by ordinary men, his saliva drooled and dripped onto the floor. And——

Gluttony: "——Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, representing Gluttony, Ley Batenkaitos."

Whether that statement was boastful or conceited, anyhow, Gluttony—— no, Ley Batenkaitos, gave his name, kicked the floor of ice the immediately following instant, and commenced his sprint with the velocity of a fired arrow.

That spectacle was like a scene of a ferocious quadruped amidst a hunt, his dash wild enough to make one truly hallucinate that as well.

Reid: "Ahhh~, what a pain."

Focusing on Batenkaitos charging ahead madly, Reid put a single finger in his ear and grumbled as if troubled,

Reid: "Well then, I'm the swordsman, Hauroy Larrier."

Subaru: "Who even is that!?"

Reid: "The guy who lived beside my house in my hometown."

Subaru thoughtlessly shouted at that excessively grand alias, to which Reid responded quite indifferently. Afterwards, he pulled his finger out of his ear and looked down onto Batenkaitos immediately before him,

Ley: "——Let's eat!!"

Reid: "Puttin' aside the smokin' nee-chan possibly sayin' that, but bein' told that by a dirty midget-chan like ya ain't makin' me happy."

Ley: "——Zuh."

As Batenkaitos advanced in with his large mouth open, his body was intensely shifted horizontally.

That was because Reid's right leg was crudely unleashed, its kick capturing the side of Batenkaitos's torso, in order to energetically strike him into the wall of the aisle.

Ley: "Guh, eh… Hk."

Reid: "Don't make the sound of a chicken bein' strangled, ya prick. Lemme tell ya, a chicken tastes delicious after bein' strangled, but I don't intend to eat'cha. Don't care 'bout gluttony or whatever it is."

Ley: "Gyah!"

Reid: "Ya came jumpin' at an adult. Hope ya're prepared for a spankin', ya priiick!"

Whilst speaking, Reid pushed Batenkaitos's body onto the wall with his leg, and started running across the frozen aisle at a speed incomprehensible for someone on one foot.

Of course, having been pushed onto the wall and being slid across its surface possessing the ruggedness of ice here and there, Batenkaitos was in no state to be able to resist. The damage was enormous and destructive.

Ley: "GIYAHHHHHHHHHHHH——!"

Reid: "Oioi, don't'cha start screamin' with only this much. This way it won't even be somethin' to consider. This ain't even what made for children's play in my era. Brats these days're not only filthy but also meager aye, oi, oi, oi, ya priiick!"

Declaring with displeasure, Reid stopped his feet and turned around halfway through at that spot.

With his leg which had pressed Batenkaitos onto the wall unfastened, the body of the Sin Archbishop slid down. Before that, the left leg he had balanced himself with launched a rotating kick which energetically slammed into Batenkaitos's side, and his petite frame was blown off like a rubble ball.

Ley: "————"

With unusual vigor, Batenkaitos sprang onto the floor whilst taking a defensive stance. The Sin Archbishop, rotating at a high speed and bleeding, went through the gap between Emilia and Julius, finally tumbling onto the back of the aisle, next to Subaru and Beatrice.

As he lay spread-eagled, fallen on the floor, no longer did he display any of his former strength.

All this was easily enough to kill anyone, but perhaps because of his exceptional awareness of defense, that was possibly not the case here.

Subaru: “That guy, he was the formidable enemy who’d been overpowering both Emilia-chan and Julius until now, right?”

Beatrice: “…No question in that, in fact. But this one exceeds norms even more, I suppose. That’s why it can be said that the situation has worsened in some way, in fact.”

Subaru: “The war cards have only changed places, huh.”

Beatrice: “That too, to a worse opponent, I suppose.”

Beatrice, while tightly holding Subaru’s hand, was vigilant regarding Reid in front of them, instead of the collapsed, immobile Batenkaitos. The same went for Emilia or Julius as well.

The situation had already shifted from the battle against Gluttony to a new warrior. Even in the midst of that——

Emilia: “Reaaally, thank you for beating the Sin Archbishop… And, can’t we just go ahead and get along like this?”

Before anything else, Emilia spoke to Reid in a friendly manner. She offered a proposal for peace befitting of her, however in response Reid shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and stomped on the floor.

Clearing away that proposal with those three gestures of his body, Reid scratched his head.

Reid: “Hah, don’t be sayin’ such demotivatin’ shit, ya twat… Actually, the hell’s up with’cha, ya twat. Ya’re too much of a smokin’ hottie, the heck’s happenin’, it ain’t a joke! Aren’t’cha a smokin’ hottie! Why’re ya here in this place, ya twat. The hell ya doin’ in this situation. Don’t be tourin’ ’round this sandy bullshit place, instead let’s go for drinks tonight, ya twat.”

Emilia: “Umm, this is the second time though…”

Julius: “——Unfortunately, she cannot accompany you for your evening drinks. The reason being…”

Reid: “Oh?”

Julius: “A night of peace shall not visit you, you phantom.”

Saying so, as if intercepting the inelegant comment, the sole man who stepped forward with his Knight’s sword prepared—— Julius, stood off Reid as if covering for Emilia, and sharpened his gaze by honing it with knightly spirit.

Right before those yellow eyes, Reid changed his expression slightly.

Reid: “…The hell, ya prick. Haven’t’cha gotten a bit better aye. Did somethin’ good happen, ya prick. A woman. Gotta be a woman, right, ya prick.”

Julius: “I shall not deny that certain events happened which affected my preparedness in many ways, however, I will state that they were not because of involvement with a female. If the embrace of a female can heal a wounded heart, then so can the relentless reprimand of a friend.”

Reid: “Still a bastard who keeps beatin’ ’round the bush, that hasn’t changed, eh. The hell do ya wanna say?”

Julius: “In other words, the fact that I am able to hold my sword like this is thanks to my friend——!”

An instant after that declaration, Julius tipped up his Knight’s sword with sharp footsteps, painting the tip of his sword with beauty enough to make one doubt their eyes, and fired a strike towards Reid’s neck.

Reid: “————”

The opponent had not shown any hostility yet, such a thoughtless identification was entirely unneeded.

Upon standing at this spot, Reid’s thoughts were clearer than fire at night—— his unrestrainable fighting spirit could even be felt on the skins of the bystanders fleetingly.

It was inconceivable that one possessing such fighting spirit would remain without using his weapons.

——Reid was motivated. Just like in the previous loop, without giving any regard to the surrounding situation either.

Hence, Julius made the preemptive strike without any indecision.

That choice was the optimal solution. It could be affirmed that this precise strike aimed for dampening the calm and composed attitude of Reid, was a necessity for defeating the First Generation Sword Saint at this juncture. The problem was——

Reid: "——Do ya have any idea what it means to be calm 'n composed?"

Julius: "————"

Reid: "It means bein' able to do anythin' with flexibility regardless of whatever petty tricks're played, ya idiiiot."

——Julius's preemptive strike had been intercepted and stopped by the two chopsticks Reid held in his hand.

Julius: "Kuh… Hk."

Reid: "Well, it wasn't bad, ya know? If yer opponent weren't me, ya'd've probably made 'em taste at least this one—— Well then, let's go."

Julius: "Tch!"

Julius let out a groan at his thrust being defended against, to which Reid laughed like a shark.

At the same pace, Reid gripped one chopstick in each of his hands and swept away the tip of the sword; plus, simultaneously, he stomped ahead and launched blows from his chopsticks. The impact struck the Knight's sword solidly, giving rise to a clear echo.

Julius: "————"

Two slim sticks far shorter than a sword in terms of length, but by being wielded by the expert known as Reid, they turned into a weapon far greater than their size let on, and revealed destruction.

The moment subsequent to that clear echo, the shockwaves that rose made Julius's hair and clothes flutter, and created cracks in all of the frozen parts of the aisle all at once.

——Literally exceeding norms, going against common sense, it was a lump of abnormality befitting to be named as a glitch of this world.

Even though Subaru had seen his physical strength several times in the past, seeing the personage himself rendered Subaru speechless.

The negativity of the fact that such a monster existed in this world, and the devilish nature of the latent feelings of the designer who decided to include overcoming this monster as one of the conditions for the Tower's capture, nauseated his chest. However——

Reid: "——Oh, I'm actually a tad impressed."

It was unknown how much of Reid's full strength had been applied into that blow of the chopsticks.

However, it appeared that even that blow being accepted was out of Reid's calculations, and he commended Julius's fighting spirit for warding off the chopsticks' strike.

Receiving that, Julius squinted his eyes while blood seeped out from the edge of his mouth.

Julius: "After all, I must win against you or otherwise our calculations will flunk, you see."

Reid: "Yer intent's to win, ain't it? Yet ya dare to bark at me."

Julius: "So it seems. But, allow me to give you company!"

At that moment, a strike of Julius's sword flashed, which was fended off by Reid with his two chopsticks in a crude manner.

The sword's momentum got deflected, and Julius's stance crumbled—— was not the case. Julius, having considered his Knight's sword being swept away, rotated, and delivered a second blow of the sword with no lag whatsoever.

Thus commenced a swords dance, like a refined flow of water with not a single droplet going to waste.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru inhaled, witnessing with his own eyes the swords dance, an accumulation of countless offensive and defensive moves.

This was the limit of what Subaru was able to follow with his eyes; indeed, what Subaru was able to follow his eyes amounted to this much. But, this was proof of Julius Juukulius's willpower and disciplining in seeking to reach the pinnacle of the sword called the Sword Saint.

——If Reid's swordsmanship was like blazing flames, then Julius's own was like flowing water.

Speaking in terms of basic compatibility, then the water ought to extinguish the flames, however, the flames here were mighty, so mighty that they could simply evaporate the opposing water and reduce it to nothing.

Perhaps, many swordsmen akin to flowing water had been evaporated away by the blazing flames of Reid's swordsmanship.

However, at the very least, Julius had no fear of throwing himself in there and getting himself evaporated as he continued launching destructive and unavoidable attacks upon Reid. And——

Emilia: "Don't think that your opponent is just Julius!"

Reid: "Hah! I ain't forgettin', smokin' hottie! Yer face's too good to forget!"

Emilia: "Thank you for the compliment! But, there's only one person who truly remembered!"

Emilia joined Reid and Julius's swords dance wielding a mountain of armaments of ice.

Due to that, Reid turned one of his chopsticks against Julius and the other against Emilia. Whether that could even serve as a countermeasure, such banal sense of values were smashed by Reid's swordsmanship.

Glaciation interrupted the swords dance of blazing flames and flowing water, and the colors of the battlefield altered into further vividness yet again.

The cast of the swords dance had been changed by one, with Reid being the opponent instead of Batenkaitos, and Emilia and Julius's crude coordination resumed—— No, that also changed.

Perhaps it was due to the enemy being stronger, but much more likely it was that the two of them brought their battling style closer to each other's in this short interval and made amendments, somehow making them match the other's smoothly; and so, their cooperation turned into actual cooperation.

Beatrice: "Julius is matching with Emilia, in fact."

Subaru: "You get it?"

Beatrice: "There's also their compatibility on the basis of their personality, I suppose. Emilia's resolve became better, and Julius became capable of moving accordingly, in fact. Probably, Emilia was correct in getting rid of the idea to match him, I suppose."

Subaru: "What an amazing *chuu*[212]."

Regardless, since it was going well, that judgement had to be correct.

In the end, Emilia did not hold back and did everything at her own pace, and Julius matched with the other person's easy-to-comprehend movements, adorning himself being his specialty.

Reid: "Hahaa! Good goin' good goin', ya pricks! I'm startin' to have fun too!"

Emilia: "Uyah! Seyah! Toriyah! Hiyahiyahiyaaa!"

Joyfully brushing away the two whilst they cordially engaged with each other, Reid laughed loudly. Emilia then let out a shout and launched a mighty attack one would not think could come from that voice, but it failed to become the decisive blow.

A marvelous swords dance, as if an illusion of water, fire and ice intertwining.

The Knight's sword of steel, the sticks that appeared to have been turned into steel due to the skill and force they were being used with, and the weapons of ice which struck, broke and regenerated, all gave rise to high-pitched notes.

[212] Engrish flip. Means "comment/explanation" (注), originally "コメント" (comment).

The sight was so beautiful, that it was capable of making one misunderstand that such a dance was truly being performed——

???: "——Shaaaaaaaaa!!"

Henceforth, the dissonant existence which wedged itself in obstructively, seared itself into everyone's minds as foreign to both eyes and ears.

Subaru: "Bastard… Hk!"

Squeezing himself into the space where the battle of the three unfolded, obstructively and rudely, was what Ley Batenkaitos did.

The young boy who was supposed to have eaten Reid's kick and tumbled into a state of near-death. He stood up and rose once again, joining in on the battlefield as if he had not suffered any damage whatsoever.

Batenkaitos swung the daggers fastened to the wrists on both of his hands, and by combining those with the battle techniques that made skillful use of his short limbs, he continuously fired fatal attacks onto the three one after the other.

Emilia, Julius and Reid, each of them defended themselves with annoyance, They caught Emilia, Julius and Reid off-guard and the three respectively defended against them, troubled and hurriedly. However, their defense against them was imperfect, and some bits of their hair and clothes got sliced off,

Julius: "How stubborn of you to not give up, Sin Archbishop!"

Ley: "Hahaaa! Shunning us and then having fun, stop doing such nasty things, nii-sama! Always and always having it just to yourself, eh? How unfair, truly!"

Emilia: "Reid! I'm sure you get it! That there's no point even if we fight here! Will you help us, just stay still at the very least, please!"

Reid: "What a clueless woman ya are, smokin' hottie. I'm enjoyin' myself as things're, ya know? Even if the great stars fall from the sky, my plans ain't bendin'!"

Emilia: "————"

The four, whilst exchanging heroic blows upon each other, knocked their respective wills against one another.

This was a spectacle of battle, impossible to be approached readily, impossible to be disunited from the odor of blood, in which it was impossible to reach a common ground.

For an outsider, it was difficult to judge who was at an advantage, who was at a disadvantage, who was superior, who was inferior.

All what was possible was to hope for their allies' victory, however——

Subaru: "——Guh."

Beatrice: "Subaru!?"

Then, Beatrice was astonished to see Subaru, who could do nothing but watch and hope, kneel down whilst gripping onto his chest.

She knelt down and touched Subaru's shoulder, looking at his face as he breathed hoarsely.

Beatrice: "Subaru, Subaru! What's wrong, in fact? What happened, I suppose!?"

Subaru: "…No, what is… this?"

Beatrice: "Subaru?"

Against Beatrice's desperate calls, Subaru tightened his grip onto his chest and blinked repeatedly.

There was absolutely no intention to deceive or fool around in him. But even Subaru could not comprehend this. This peculiarly oddity, this pain—— unbelievable heat swelled up in the interior of his chest.

His heart was beating at a rate as if it would explode, he could feel every single drop of blood flowing within his body, an awful and incomprehensible sensation like that of an alarm bell was sounding off.

Subaru: "————"

He did not understand. Right now, what was happening to his body?

This phenomenon was something that had not happened in any of the loops until the current one. Was it some sort of chronic sickness, or even worse, some sort of magical interference?

Rushing across all of the knowledge he possessed in his mind, he went through the worst-case possibilities and shook his head.

No. This was perhaps, not something negative. The alarm bell was sounding only because of a problem.

Subaru: “Ha, ah…”

Inhaling deeply, he then exhaled.

Till now, Subaru’s brain was being seared by concern for Emilia and Julius who were fighting Batenkaitos and Reid right in front of him.

In terms of the situation, his powerless self could do nothing but stand and watch.

In this situation, what was scorching Subaru’s brain, was the advance of the five obstacles while they were busy with this—— that being, the two remaining obstacles.

——The five obstacles.

One was the large horde of Witchbeasts which surrounded the Tower. One was the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, who would launch an attack on the Tower. One was Reid Astrea, who would start freely walking around the Tower—— Three of these were present in the current situation.

The remaining two were, the titanic scorpion which would wander around the Tower with an expression as if it owned the place, and the colossal black shadow that would swallow the Tower with fearsome power.

Those two must also be dealt with, or the problems falling upon the Tower would not get disposed of.

On the background of Emilia and Julius’s strenuous efforts, the moment he troubled over dealing with the possibilities seeking the collapse of the Tower, his chest pounded with heat and made Subaru kneel down.

His heart continued beating fiercely.

Remaining conscious of his heartbeats, Subaru slowly breathed and closed his eyes. He thought that he should do what his body wished him to do. Abiding by that, he closed his eyes.

Beatrice: "————"

Seeing Subaru's condition, Beatrice stopped her calls.

Perhaps she possessed no confidence in doing so either. Yet she made that gesture. Subaru was blessed to possess such understanding comrades.

And, behind Subaru's eyelids, a curious sensation welled up.

——They were faint, fleeting lights levitating against dim darkness.

Subaru: "——?"

Faint, warm and blurry lights.

There was one right beside Subaru, and two at a slight distance from him. Strangely enough, Subaru comprehended that there were lights behind him without even having to glance backwards.

Behind him, were four lights. One of them was at some distance from the rest, and, and, and——

——He realized that one was approaching overhead.

Subaru: "——Beatrice!"

Beatrice: "Hyah!"

For some reason Subaru blindly trusted this sensation and without any hesitation, he rushed towards Beatrice and leapt away from that spot.

Hugging the young girl's light body in his arms, Subaru tumbled onto the floor without faltering—— that instant, he grasped that scorching heat assailed the thigh of his right leg, as he gave rise to a wail of anguish.

Subaru: "Gah, GUOOOOOOH!"

He instantly realized that the burning sensation originated from a deep wound. Perhaps in an attempt to turn his eyes away from his wounded leg, Subaru looked at Beatrice whilst hugging her.

And, forcing his eyes to open through the pain and tears, he saw.

???: "————"

Subaru: "I knew, it'd come, this shitty scorpion… Hk!"

Subaru threw that up in rage; with this as the second chance meeting with it as well, what had appeared before him was the titanic scorpion—— the scorpion, possessing a black shell and eyes like red luminous dots, had the rest of its legs crawl on the wall as it lorded over Subaru and the others.

Beatrice: "——Ah."

Faced with that horrifyingly humongous creature, Beatrice widened her eyes. Within Beatrice's line of sight, were the scorpion's pincers, which had inflicted a deep gouge to Subaru's leg. The scorpion ecstatically upheld Subaru's flesh in its pincers, dripping a large amount of blood onto the aisle.

——He had been worried about the intrusion of the titanic scorpion.

The five obstacles he needed to overcome, had all assembled here.

Subaru: "————"

This was bad. This was bad this was bad. This was bad this was bad this was bad. This was bad this was bad this was bad this

Even if Meili and Shaula restrained the horde of Witchbeasts, the other cards had already failed to function well with these turn of events. This, would not do.

This path, would not do. With a further, different way of action——

Beatrice: "——Subaru!"

Julius: "Subaru!"

Emilia: "Subaru!!"

Subaru, gnashing his teeth, was able to hear three voices strike his eardrums, calling for him.

Beatrice's poignant voice, Julius's tensed voice, Emilia's pleading voice, Subaru heard them respectively call for him, and finally.

Batenkaitos, Reid, the titanic scorpion, each of them moved towards the others.

As if in order to hinder the actions, the path of Natsuki Subaru, but even before that——

???: "————"

——An impact struck the Tower with immense vigor, its entirety quaking with violence, and a thunderous roar echoed.

Subaru: "————"

With that Subaru's body, lying on the floor, bounced away, Emilia and the others who had waged battle were blown away, even the titanic scorpion's shell was crushed, as the world crumbled.

The small body beside Subaru was hugging him seemingly in order to protect him. Hugging that soft body back, Subaru widened his eyes in the midst of the impact.

???: "——I love you."

——There present was solely the darkness harboring blind love, as it tried to swallow Subaru.

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——At that instant everything in the world, white and black, men and women, love and hate, all had been consumed by the quaking impact, but solely Natsuki Subaru managed to escape it.

???: "——Subaru."

Subaru: "——Hk!"

???: "Uhyah!"

A call towards him; in an attempt to draw it closer to him, Subaru hugged the owner of that voice.

Within his arms, the body moved about in fluster and panic, looking upwards from the middle of his chest. That was——

Subaru: "Bea… trice…"

Beatrice: "Y-yes, I suppose! You doing this so suddenly is surprising, in fact. Well, it's not as if Betty doesn't like it, I suppose. But, Betty was just worried because you'd only returned from the Book… but, seeing Betty's name being called first is relieving, I suppose."

Subaru: "————"

Indeed, Beatrice whispered so while still in Subaru's arms. Hearing her words, Subaru looked around himself.

What had happened immediately prior; he had fallen onto the aisle, his leg had also been wounded, and then he had gone into that dark, dark shadow——

Subaru: "…Library?"

???: "For the moment, if you could clear whether you are still half asleep or not then I believe we could proceed with our codes of action as well, Natsuki-kun."

That voice struck Subaru, who was astonished to find himself surrounded by vast stores of books.

Upon looking, he found that it had been Echidna, smiling wryly whilst caressing her light-purple hair. Behind her was the shelf she leaned on and Meili, who rested her chin on her hands saying, “You’re finally uuup”.

Subaru: “————”

Beatrice: “Wah, wahwah! Subaru! Subaru, what happened, in fact! Are you not feeling well after all, I suppose? Can you speak about what you saw in the Book, in fact?”

Subaru: “Ah, well, hmm. I also, need to do that, but…”

Subaru tightly hugged Beatrice’s petite body, and enjoyed her warmth.

And, recognized the reality that he had to recognize.

——He had returned. To this moment.

Subaru had returned to this moment, having failed to overcome the five obstacles.

Arc 6 Chapter 66 – Second Chance Toward the Denouement

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 5 “An Unreasonable Sword’s Judgment”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——The first thing he did was to make his heart accept the truth that he had Returned by Death.

Subaru: “————”

Whilst stroking the concerned Beatrice’s head, who was in his arms, Subaru reflected onto the “predicament” that he had experienced immediately prior, that were also happenings of the future.

The fact that he had Returned by Death meant that he had been unable to evade the circumstance of crises befalling onto his life.

Ignoring the disasters he knew would arrive, he had exposed the lives of his comrades to hazard—— no, that was naïve. That was not what had happened.

He had not exposed their lives to hazard. Subaru had let Emilia and the others die.

He knew that would be what it would come down to, yet he had overlooked it.

The five obstacles assailing the Tower were an existence difficult to be neglected. Despite knowing of that, Subaru had failed to evade the problems due to his indiscretion and naïveté.

What perhaps had decisively taken his life away at the very last moment, had been the colossal black shadow, which relentlessly destroyed this humongous and gigantic Tower itself—— that was, the greatest and the final obstacle.

Taking it into account, he arranged the five obstacles in his mind again.

The first was the large horde of Witchbeasts, pushing into the Tower all at once.

The second one was the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, coming with the aim of Subaru's Memories and Name.

The third was the titanic scorpion, which would invade the Tower at some unknown time, lurking in a blind spot, and subsequently attack.

Fourth was the rampaging Reid Astrea, swaggering about freely in the Tower, ignoring all enemies and allies.

The fifth one and the last one was the black shadow, which swallowed and ruined everything.

Their circumstances evolved at the same time, and overlooking even a single one of them would easily cause the entire plan to collapse.

Could it be said that the jet-black shadow, which should by all means be feared, was a gesture of kindness by this unfair and absurd world, by notifying Subaru of a time limit? He was in a dilemma whether it was an issue he should feel grateful for.

Subaru: "Leaving the first one, the large horde of Witchbeasts to Meili and Shaula…"

This choice could be affirmed to not have been wrong.

Last time—— no, right now, that would be the time prior to the last one; in the loops until the second-to-last time, the five obstacles certainly had also occurred concurrently. Subaru had also witnessed the scenario of the Witchbeasts invading into the Tower.

Should that happen, crucial fighting forces like Emilia and Julius would have to face the Witchbeasts in order to restrain them. That had been avoided in this loop, in which Meili had survived.

The strength of Meili's existence was unmistakably a single step forward.

However, it was still not sufficient.

Even if the large horde of Witchbeasts could be held back, Subaru and the others were helpless against the following obstacle.

Emilia had gotten her Name robbed by the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony who had appeared, and though they had somehow managed to have Julius join the fight against Batenkaitos, subsequently, Reid partook in the battlefield.

Resultantly, the two, Emilia and Julius, were forced to battle in two fronts against both Gluttony and Reid, causing valuable time to be lost ultimately leading to the titanic scorpion's intrusion, and reaching right at the shadow's announcement that time was up.

In other words, that balance must not happen. The number of moves they had was lacking.

On top of that, what Subaru feared were the words of the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony—— if Louis Arneb were correct, two of Gluttony were supposed to have arrived.

He had encountered Ley Batenkaitos. However, the other one's form was nowhere to be seen.

——This was bad. This was bad this was bad this was bad. At any rate, this was bad.

Even though the situation was progressing with every second, even though Subaru alone had attained a grasp on all the problems, even though he had piled up so many deaths, he did not have the full picture in clarity.

It had taken far too long for him to take a step. Why did his self, spend so much time in inactivity——

Beatrice: "——Calm down, I suppose!"

Subaru: "Ahyah!"

With Subaru's brain overheating, smoke about to billow from it, Beatrice suddenly sandwiched his cheeks between her two small hands with force, bringing his consciousness back to reality through pain.

With her hands still on his cheeks, Beatrice resumed at distance close enough to exchange breaths.

Beatrice: "Subaru, talk about what happened in the book, in fact. It'll be fruitless if you take it upon yourself alone, I suppose. Explain it properly, and we'll think about it together… That's Betty and the others' forte, in fact."

Subaru: "What happened, in the book, huh…"

Hearing Beatrice's earnest appeal, Subaru looked at the situation he had been placed in with a bird's-eye view.

He had accepted the truth that he had Returned by Death. And similarly, he also had to recognize and etch the place he had returned to as well.

This place, was the Third Floor's Library of Taygeta.

In the room surrounded with bookshelves housing countless Books of the Dead, Subaru had returned to the scene that took place immediately after his consciousness came back from challenging Reid's Book of the Dead.

And, speaking of what had happened to Subaru in the book——

Subaru: "——Stand up, happened."

Beatrice: "Eh?"

Subaru: "No, I mean I got my back kicked and was driven out of giving up. Shit, this is so pathetic. I've made no progress at all."

Subaru scratched his head in front of Beatrice, who rounded her eyes.

He subsequently stood up whilst keeping Beatrice in his grasp, and slowly looked towards the environs——towards the duo of Echidna and Meili. The members who had been waiting for Subaru to wake up quietly.

He was already aware of what the missing Emilia and Ram, Shaula and Julius were doing.

The circumstances were already breaking forth, there was no time to halt.

That was why——

Subaru: "I'll cut it short. I failed to see Reid's memories in the Book of the Dead. Something got in the way. Books of the Dead are connected to the soles of the existence called Od Lagna, that's where I encountered a problematic fella."

Hearing Subaru's short and quick explanation, the three widened their eyes in surprise.

Subaru gestured an apology for not giving them the time to halt and give thought to it, and continued his words. Them being——

Subaru: "——The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Louis Arneb, has declared war on us."

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"Anastasia": "Though I must say, we have come so far to the eastern border, and Sin Archbishops again, huh. It seems that there is a profound and immeasurable connection between them and Natsuki-kun."

After listening to his explanation, Echidna ridiculed Subaru's circumstances with that comment.

Whilst hearing that comment, Subaru and the others jumped and descended the staircase of the Library, moving in order to reunite with their comrades who had distanced themselves from Taygeta.

Subaru: "Unfortunately, I happen to have amnesia. I have no idea about having a relationship with these Sin Archbishop folks worth calling profound… Am I really that connected to them?"

Beatrice: "At the very least, they are the ones responsible for making us come to this Tower, I suppose. Seeking a solution to what all they had done, we made a long journey through the desert."

Subaru: "I reckon I've only heard the surface of the aim behind coming to this Tower, so they were the true origin. They're really unable to do anything decent."

Frowning in tediousness, Subaru was stumped by happening to have a destined relationship with unpleasant parties.

Although he did not press them much about it, both Beatrice and Echidna did not limit the people he was connected to as only Gluttony. If Subaru's ideas were correct, then there were perhaps seven people who were all Sin Archbishops, thus he conjectured that the ones he had gotten involved with had not been solely Gluttony.

Subaru: "That depresses me, so I don't want to talk about it right now… Ah."

???: "Echidna! And Subaru is with you as well!"

And, once Subaru and the others returned to the Fourth Floor and sprinted towards the aisle, the person who came dashing towards them just then—— Julius, raised a voice of surprise.

Last time as well, Julius had returned to Taygeta in order to inform Echidna and Subaru of the atypical situation surrounding the Tower. They had now encountered him a bit earlier.

Seeing Subaru having safely returned from the Book of the Dead, Julius said,

Julius: “So you are safe, Subaru. Did you secure vital information from the Book of the Dead?”

Subaru: “Though it’ll be the same explanation I gave to Beatrice and the others, that failed. The detailed explanation’s a question for me later, so I’d like to solve these abnormal circumstances concurrently.”

Julius: “What do you mean, in other words?”

Subaru: “It means I can guess what the general situation is—— Right now, Witchbeasts are surrounding the Tower, right?”

The moment Subaru fired his question, an immense tremor jolted the Tower.

That indistinct and constant something akin to tremors reached everyone present inside the Tower. Its cause being correctly guessed made Julius gaze in slight wonderment.

However, he immediately lowered his chin and nodded,

Julius: “Just as you say. Currently, the environs of Pleiades Watchtower have been besieged by a great number of Witchbeasts. At the outer edge of the Tower, Miss Shaula is fighting arduously to stall the Witchbeasts’ incursion, but…”

Meili: “If the identity of these tremors is a horde of bad animal-chans theeen, no matter how strongly the naked onee-san may stand she’ll eventually not be able to restrain theeem.”

Julius: “Henceforth, I want you to lend your strength. What do you say, Meili?”

Meili jumped into the conversation, and Julius faced and requested her with sincerity. Accepting his sincerity, Meili turned a profoundly meaningful gaze towards Subaru and the others.

Getting the impression that the gaze intended to ask about the pros and cons about her actions, Subaru lightly inhaled and nodded.

Subaru: “I’m going to request that of you as well. Meili, nothing will get sorted if it isn’t for you. Sorry for this being so sudden, but please cooperate so that we can all take a step forward together.”

Meili: “…Hmm? Geez onii-san, still so pathetic even after saying such grand wooords. But, since you asked me earnestly, leave that place to me. Be gratefuuul.”

Subaru: “Ah, my heartfelt gratitude! I love you!”

Meili: “How peeetty…”

Making a sour look in response to Subaru’s gratitude, Meili gave her consent to being the one to deal with the Witchbeasts. With this, one of the five obstacles would be cleared. Up to this point, it had gone the same as last time. Hence——

Julius: “Well then, let’s take her to Miss Shaula…”

Subaru: “No, we’ll be taking a different course of action. Meili, do you know where the balcony is? Work together with Shaula there, and do something to stall the Witchbeasts in any way.”

Meili: “The end of the aisle, riiight? Really, you don’t know hooow to treat people.”

Hearing that, Meili spilled a sigh and dashed off. Though languid and unenthusiastic, seeing her move in accordance with his own orders, Subaru understood that that was her way of walking. That was as fast as she could run. And,

Julius: “Subaru, the Witchbeasts aside, you seem to possess some sort of conviction. What are you aware of?”

Subaru: “Guess it seems so. I’ll explain it along the way. Come with me for now—— We must hurry, or Emilia-chan and the others will be in danger.”

Julius: “——Hk!”

Julius widened his eyes in astonishment, and Subaru broke into a run after patting his shoulder. He held Beatrice in his arms, and Echidna hurried behind them as well.

For a moment Julius was stumped but shook his head, and caught up to his back quickly.

Subaru: “Earlier I told you that I failed to dive into the Book of the Dead, right. I couldn’t see Reid’s Memories. Instead of that, I came across another chap over there… I encountered the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony.”

Julius: “——No way. Why would Gluttony be in the Book of the Dead?”

Hearing the name of the enemy he had a connection to, Julius’s expression froze. Echidna called out to his side profile with “Julius”.

She alone was making an expression of feeling chagrined pertaining to the speed of her feet, as she raised a single finger,

“Anastasia”: “According to what Natsuki-kun said, the Books of the Dead are an apparatus of the cradle of Od Lagna… the Hall of Memories, in order to take custody of the Memories of the dead, the paths of life walked. And, the Sin Archbishops of Gluttony eat the Memories and Names of others. In other words…”

Julius: “Their Authority, is to make use of that aspect of Od Lagna’s power…? No, you said that you met Gluttony in the book, right. If that’s so then, Subaru, the reason behind your memory loss is…”

Subaru: “Yeah, it’s nothing like the Tower’s trap or mechanism. A complete *Formido Oppugnatura Exsequens*[213]… Meaning, it was an accident caused by a random encounter. The same way of victimization as you say.”

It was impossible to imagine having to encounter Gluttony when facing the Book of the Dead.

[213] The original Japanese is “純然たるＦＯＥ”, in which FOE is an acronym pertaining to the game series Etrian Odyssey, and used to refer to powerful enemies akin to mini-bosses which should be avoided at the beginning of a dungeon. The acronym itself has various localizations: in Japan, it means Field on Enemy, whereas in the United States it holds the meaning written in this compilation.

If Subaru and the others' imagination last time had been correct as well, then the Book of the Dead possessing the possibility of encountering Gluttony was solely Reid's Book, who had been reconstructed in the Tower.

How terrible a fortune would one need for that to happen; he also wished to object to the deeds of the Subaru until yesterday. So much so, that he had started wanting to believe idle gossip like him truly possessing a connection with the Sin Archbishops.

Julius: "For it to be the same as this, would be quite in awful taste, I must say… However, if there had been contact between you and Gluttony as far as last night, then this charge of the Witchbeasts would also be because of that?"

Beatrice: "It'd mean that the enemy ended up getting more than half-a-day's time for making preparations, I suppose. Had Subaru remembered, matters might've been… Ah! Betty isn't reproaching Subaru, in fact!"

Subaru: "I know. But, it's a matter-of-course that you'd reproach me. It would've been better had the me until yesterday not made this blunder, it would've been better if the me of right now were smarter."

Were that the case, they surely would have been able to face the enemy in a further prepared state.

But saying that now was pointless. Contesting with all cards they possessed, that was vital.

What was needed was readiness, decisiveness and the intent to have faith in—— not in oneself, but in comrades.

Subaru: "Just as you've guessed, the horde of Witchbeasts is Gluttony's doing. On top of that, Gluttony himself will march in and enter… aiming for Emilia-chan and us."

And before Subaru and the others reached her, having noticed it late, Emilia would be coerced into making strenuous fighting efforts on her lonesome and letting Ram's group escape, calling the result of getting one's Name eaten upon herself.

They must stop that from happening this time—— For that purpose, he had taken shortcuts in several positions of the game.

Subaru: “If we don’t let Emilia-chan’s Name get robbed…”

——Perhaps, they might prevent Ram from withdrawing from the war front.

Subaru: “————”

Last time, the reason why Ram had been unable to undertake action was the result of Batenkaitos stealing Emilia’s Name, for she had been unable to react to Emilia’s existence being missing from her memories.

Should that risk be done away with, it would be plausible to expect Ram to be a fighting force. Should they hold onto Rem and take care of her, whom she had brought with herself, then there should not be any issues in that regard either.

And, if the tag team of Emilia and Ram could hold Batenkaitos down.

Subaru: “Julius! There’s a job you have to do as well! We’ll somehow manage things with Gluttony. There’s another destined opponent for you. I very well get your feeling of wanting to send him flying, but…”

Julius: “But, what? In this place, an opponent which should be prioritized above Gluttony can’t…”

Subaru: “——Reid’s going to come down. If he manages to interfere, then everything’ll come down to nothing. There’s the role to stop that.”

Julius: “————”

Receiving that elucidation, the repeated surprise yielded wrinkles at the center of Julius’s forehead yet again.

However, rather than meager astonishment this time it was composed more of perplexity, and doubt.

It was a matter-of-course.

The attack and raid by the large horde of Witchbeasts and the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony; both of those could be disposed of as things he heard directly from Gluttony in the Book of the Dead.

However, matters would differ should Reid's existence get tangled with that. There was no point of contact between the existence of Reid and Gluttony. Because at the very least, the facility of the Tower and the Sin Archbishops were unrelated.

Henceforth, seeking a logical basis for that explanation was not possible——

Julius: "…If that is true, then let us assume Reid Astrea shall arrive downstairs. In this state of affairs, the possibility of him acting whilst ignoring them…"

Subaru: "Can't imagine that happening, right? Really? Does he seem to be the type of guy who'd be influenced by the surrounding situation?"

Beatrice: "…Sorry, but Betty can't imagine that happening, in fact. That thing has the nature to prioritize whatever it wants to do, I suppose. No matter what the situation."

Beatrice assented so on the basis of an unpleasant confirmation whilst being carried in Subaru's arms. Hearing her, Julius reached a conclusion then looked at Echidna, as if asking for final thoughts.

Echidna shrugged her petite shoulders in response to his gaze.

"Anastasia": "I agree as well. Regardless, it is difficult to believe he would start walking around freely in the Tower. Though it would be more accurate to say that I do not want to believe that… Natsuki-kun, would that information too be…?"

Subaru: "——That's right. I heard from Gluttony."

After hesitating for a moment, Subaru nodded and boldly lied, responding to Echidna's question.

In fact, the possibility of Gluttony playing a role in the sequence of events of Reid walking freely was slim. At the very least, Batenkaitos had been surprised by Reid's presence, and looking at how they dealt with each other, he must not have summoned Reid as an ally either.

Ergo why this had been entirely unable to convey the authenticity of the information Subaru had, being more like a safeguard.

Julius: "————"

Listening to Subaru's answer, who was at a somewhat rough spot, Julius dove into his thoughts making a strained face.

However, even when they were troubled with thoughts, time continued to flow moment-by-moment. Especially presently, the situation of the Tower was worsening with the horde of Witchbeasts and Sin Archbishops.

Recognizing that fact, Echidna called out saying "Julius",

"Anastasia": "In the present situation, I am also hesitant about keeping distance from visible threats and turning towards potential hazards. But, Natsuki-kun's words…"

Julius: "Should be trusted… Yes, I know, Echidna. To be honest, I find it regrettable to turn away from the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, a bitter enemy of mine as well. However…"

Subaru: "——Reid Astrea, can only be left to you. Just as I told you earlier."

Julius: "…If I do not win, our calculations will fail, was it. Geez, such incorrigible killing words."

Should their calculations fail, should the gears come disjointed, perhaps what would be yielded forth would be a tragedy lacking reason.

As if having caught a glimpse of that in Subaru's earnest, black eyes, Julius let out a deep sigh.

Julius: "I promise you. I shall take the responsibility for Reid—— However, if things turn out that he cannot move from the Second Floor then I shall join you. Any objections?"

Subaru: "None. There can't be anything better than you being *riyoukanouna*[214], and Reid being immobile. I'll leave the judgement of the timing up to you, but it's your duty to win against Reid as well, you know."

Julius: "Very well, I understand. Echidna, Beatrice-sama, I shall leave the rest to you."

Subaru: "Leave it to me…"

[214] Engrish flip. Means "available" (利用可能な), originally "フリー" (free).

Subaru distorted his cheeks at the remark entrusting the other two rather than himself, whereas Julius smoothly caressed his bangs and gallantly turned their back towards them.

The cuffs of his white clothes getting disordered, Julius kicked the floor with his lengthy legs and headed for the staircase to the Second Floor.

“Anastasia”: “——I will not press you much regarding how you got that conviction.”

Subaru: “————”

“Anastasia”: “What is important, is that we trust you. I will appreciate it if you do not betray mine or his feelings.”

Subaru: “I don’t know what you’re talking about, but you have my gratitude.”

Having seen off Julius’s back, Echidna addressed him in a low tone. The true intent of those words was targeted at how flimsy the connection between Reid and Gluttony felt.

Gulping down that unease, Echidna and Julius made the gesture of trusting Subaru’s discourse. He must respond to their trust, their expectations.

Subaru: “——Uh.”

Abruptly, just when his mind came upon such thoughts, a chilling sensation rose in the interior of Subaru’s chest.

Beatrice furrowed her eyebrows upon Subaru’s response, but Subaru narrowed his eyes and turned away from her reaction.

——He had memories of this warmth.

It was the queer warmth he had tasted immediately prior to being swallowed by the shadow in the previous loop. His heart rate increasing, Subaru suffered the chilling warmth and closed his eyes.

What levitated at the back of his eyelids were balls of light, shivering with fleetingness and transience.

One was within his arms and one was right next to him, and one was in the direction Subaru was facing——

Subaru: “Let’s hurry! We all have to go by ourselves and join Emilia-chan and the others!”

“Anastasia”: “That is all well and good, but will we be of any help? To say it clearly, you as you are right now and Beatrice, and me on top of that, are all non-combatants.”

Beatrice: “Betty can act as a bit of fighting force upon wanting to fight, in fact. Besides, Subaru must not be aiming to be a reinforcement either, I suppose.”

With Subaru having sprinted ahead, Beatrice and Echidna exchanged their views.

Echidna’s anxiety was undisputable, and Beatrice’s idea was correct.

Sadly enough, Subaru and the others could not act as reinforcement for Emilia in terms of being military assets. Instead of them——

???: “——Barusu! So you have woken up!”

Subaru: “Ram!”

Around a bend in the aisle, was the same spectacle as before—— the figure of Ram on Patrasche’s back, with Rem in her arms, appeared.

She jauntily jumped off Patrasche’s back and handed over the reins to Subaru,

Ram: “You took too long to wake up! Look after Rem! Protect her with the resolve to die, you won’t be excused if you hurt her or touch her in a weird manner. Ram will——”

Subaru: “Wait wait wait, in a lot of ways you’re too fast! I get what you’re talking about but calm down! You’re…”

Ram: “The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony is here! Emilia-sama is fighting back, but she won’t fare well. Ram must return immediately, or it will be too late!”

Subaru: “————”

That instant, the emotions recurring within Subaru’s chest were complex.

Concern for Ram, who hurriedly wanted to return to the battlefield, relief over hearing Emilia's name from her mouth, rage sprouting towards the presence of the abominable Batenkaitos, his bitter enemy, being confirmed.

Keeping those aside, Subaru handed over the reins he had been given to Echidna.

Subaru: "Echidna! I'm counting on you to take Rem and Patrasche to a safe zone! The balcony or the Second Floor won't do! You can't get close to the Green Room right now either. Taygeta should probably be the safest!"

"Anastasia": "Natsuki-kun, what about you!?"

Subaru: "Beatrice and I will go with Ram for the Sin Archbishop!"

Subaru glared into the pale cerulean eyes of Echidna, who had been startled by having the reins handed to her suddenly. Whilst she inhaled faintly Subaru caressed Patrasche's neck and jerked his chin seeing Rem on Patrasche's back,

Subaru: "Earlier, you said this. To not betray your trust. I'm counting on you for the same. Rem's in your hands. She's, an indispensable girl for «Natsuki Subaru»."

"Anastasia": "——What a curious thing to say. Even though you yourself are supposed to be Natsuki Subaru."

Subaru: "…I also trust you for understanding my feelings a bit, you know."

He had heard that the existence of Echidna consisted of having borrowed the body of a young girl originally named Anastasia. That could also be said to be a position similar to the present Natsuki Subaru, who was overwriting the existence "Natsuki Subaru" with himself.

Receiving those words from Subaru, Echidna made a staggered expression,

"Anastasia": "Natsuki-kun, could it be that you are——"

Subaru: "——I'm counting on you."

Not letting Echidna complete her words, Subaru sprinted, leaving her and the rest behind.

Ram had already been heading towards the front of the aisle. Leaving while catching a small glimpse of Rem's sleeping face, atop Patrasche's back, and stimulating her own courage.

Ram: "Why did you come, Barusu. Rem is…"

Subaru: "Rem said, to do what needs to be done instead of looking after her! That was preached to me in the Book!"

Ram: "——Hk! By Rem? What does that mean?"

Ram's light-crimson eyes gave way to unrest upon Subaru's words, who was right next to her. It was just that they simply did not have enough time for him to cordially and courteously explain the events that had transpired in the Hall of Memories.

That was why Subaru conveyed only what was utmost important briefly.

Subaru: "Rem said to fight, and get things back. That's why I'll go with you too!"

Beatrice: "Of course, don't forget that Betty will be there too, in fact."

Ram: "——That is fine, for now. You'll be cross-questioned about it a hundred times later."

Subaru: "Isn't hundred a bit too scary!?"

Subaru shivered, since he could not even hear it to be a joke in Ram's case. However, it was her compassion, in letting Subaru bypass that despite him not having explained a single crucial thing.

And, the circumstance where that exactly was required, approached right in front of their eyes——

???: "——Ice Brand Arts!"

The following moment, Emilia's back was visible in the center of the frozen aisle as she fluttered, dancing about with armaments of ice.

Confronting her was the Sin Archbishop of dirty appearance, Ley Batenkaitos.

Catching sight of that, Ram shouted.

Ram: “Emilia-sama!”

Subaru was convinced that they had made it in time considering that was Emilia’s name.

And at the same time, Emilia noticed them behind upon being called, and responded with “Eh, Ram!?”,

Emilia: “Why did you come back!? And Subaru and Beatrice too, I’m glad you’re okay… But! This is reaaally dangerous right now! Stay back! Get away!”

Ram: “Rem has been evacuated to someplace safe. From now on, Ram shall also assist you in battle.”

Emilia: “But, Ram, you’re…”

Ram: “To be taken away, and do you think Ram will allow it even if you say that?”

While responding to Emilia, Ram reached to her legs and unsheathed the slender wand equipped there.

The wand was shorter than what normally magicians could be imagined to have. Though it seemed like an article with no peculiarities, it could also be felt that it exerted a sense of enigma, and a strange pressure.

And, seeing Ram’s form preparing to use it, Gluttony laughed at a distance away from Emilia,

???: “Hahaaa! What’s this what’s this, so you came back, nee-sama! Oh dear, how handsome! Why just why is nee-sama so cool? Truly, nee-sama is wonderful!”

Ram: “——Irksome. You shall be killed, Sin Archbishop.”

Ram fired her quiet intent to kill towards the Sin Archbishop clapping his hands and guffawing.

It was intense rage enough to send chills down Subaru’s spine, who had never been faced by it, as he glanced from the side. Despite receiving that direct eye contact, Batenkaitos’s composure did not flinch whatsoever.

Ley: “How nice, so nice, very nice, quite nice, as it’s nice, isn’t it nice, as it’s probably nice, as it’s perhaps nice, as we think it’s nice! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony! We apologize for arbitrarily bringing

an end to this overwhelming bond. Though in actuality, it was supposed to be a much more touching reunion, you knooow."

Ram: "What are you…"

Ley: "Something like stealing the Name and Memories of a valuable person, feels like becoming the greatest enemy upon being thought of revenge, right? Yet, the people eaten by us don't remember that in most cases, that's what we mean. Even though we love, we understand nee-sama this much, nee-sama doesn't know even the slightest bit of that feeling, that's what we mean! That's like, a wasteful way of usage like showering *solt*[215] onto a high-quality ingredient that makes you salivate, isn't it?"

Attentively and profoundly, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony commenced explaining circumstances completely impossible to be referred to.

The truth was, the power Gluttony wielded, of stealing the Memories of others, was an act equivalent to trampling upon life. Should family members, lovers, benefactors be attacked by them, the worst possible phenomenon would be that they would be forgotten and disappear onto the other side of oblivion, and the hatred which was supposed to exist would also vanish.

In one way, that would function as safety against letting anyone take revenge on themselves. However——

Ley: "——Isn't that, weeell, the greatest level of boring?"

However, none other than Batenkaitos, declared it to be boring.

Everyone: "————"

Ley: "The rich hatred that was originally supposed to be attained, or the rumbling corrupted rage, such freshly aromatic and fetid emotions get thoroughly denied, is what we mean. That's a great loss for us… Until the appearance of that onii-san over there."

Subaru: "Me…?"

[215] Intended mispronunciation. Salt in the Re: Zero world is written as "ソルテ", read "sorute", whereas the Katakana for the English word "salt" is "ソルト", read "soruto".

Ley: “Saaay onii-san, for some reason, even after we eat a person’s Name, you can still remember them, right? We pretty much do get the reason behind that? The place onii-san was born into must’ve been a bit different from here, but what’s important is the results. Onii-san, is our savior.”

Whilst saying so, Batenkaitos opened his arms wide and continued looking at Subaru with an intoxicated expression.

With a passionate and zealous gaze as if he were truly deeply in love with Subaru.

Ley: “No, let’s rather state it this way! Onii-san is our hero! Innocent, hard-working, uneasy unless someone is by his side, mean, makes our chest sting and hurt the more we think about it, on top of that, a hero who understands those feelings…!”

Subaru: “Stop with such eerie comments! With what intention are you…”

Ley: “Of course, these are emotions from the bottom of the heart. How haaarsh, how pathetiiic. Even though we are so gallantly, we are so wholeheartedly, thinking of onii-san, you know.”

Subaru could not comprehend how true a remark that was, composed of blended emotions. He could not imagine it, neither did he want to.

However, taking Batenkaitos’s comments until now into account, naturally, it became clear.

The emotions of the existence captured by him, directed towards Subaru were being—— no, deception was unnecessary.

The emotions of Rem, who had been captured by him, were being——

Ley: “How about it! If it suits you, then let’s repeat that touching passion once again! Let’s start from here, onii-san! From square one, no… From ze——”

Emilia: “——Hiyah!!”

Ley: “Woopsie!?”

At that instant, after having stalked up to Batenkaitos’s rear, Emilia slammed the large ice hammer she held in both of her hands into the back of the Sin Archbishop’s head mercilessly.

Hit by a blow devoid of leniency quite similar to one found in a manga, Batenkaitos's sentence was interrupted, and in a single moment, Batenkaitos fell forward, completely conked out.

Beatrice: "————"

Subaru: "…Huh, we won?"

Emilia: "I did it!"

With Batenkaitos silent and inactive, Emilia made a triumphant pose with her fist clenched. Only after looking at the two did Subaru finally widen his eyes at that dreadfully abrupt quick conclusion.

Beatrice: "…The curtain fell way too quickly, in fact."

Ram: "Indeed. Where should Ram take these feelings, when she was just about to tear that thing to pieces. Emilia-sama!"

Emilia: "Eh, what? W-was it wrong?"

Ram: "——No, it was splendid. Yes, truly splendid."

Beatrice, who was being hugged by Subaru, and Ram expressed their disappointment for the collapsed Gluttony.

Ram, who'd had the connection between her and the bitter enemy trampled upon in an unexpected manner, seemed to have a complex state of mind pertaining to Emilia's action. However,

Subaru: "Well, there's certainly a mountain of stuff I'd like to say, but the words which come up the first are Emilia-chan, *dekashita*[216]! With this, we should tie up Gluttony and…"

???: "——Unfortunately, it can't be allowed to go that way, onii-san."

Subaru: "————"

[216] Engrish flip. Means "good job" (でかした), originally "グッジョブ" (good job).

Before Subaru, who was thinking that the second of the five obstacles had been digested in unexpected fashion, Batenkaitos slowly and languidly stood up, despite having supposedly gone limp and collapsed.

Subaru widened his eyes in response to that unnatural movement, while Beatrice stiffened herself.

Of course, Emilia and Ram also had a hue of vigilance paint their eyes——

Ram: "Did he go crazy by getting hit in the head? Also considering his courting comments towards Barusu, if he can't discern the situation then…"

???: "Ah, ah, all that is fine. We have also already conveyed our feelings, and neither do we intend to do something like hold back…"

Halting Ram's words, Batenkaitos remained with his eyes cast downwards after standing up, hiding his face behind his long, dark-brown hair, he muttered and whispered something.

As if overlapping with those whispers, a distorted and repulsive sound echoed through the aisle.

Emilia: "You're kidding…"

Emilia blinked her amethyst eyes in response to the bizarre happening accompanying the repulsive echo.

What was being reflected in her beautiful eyes was Batenkaitos's body changing from its very skeletal structure, giving rise to a distorted sound—— the flesh body of the petite youth morphed into a muscly and brawny giant.

A nightmarish occurrence, but what was truly nightmarish for Subaru was waiting ahead.

???: "Right, onii-san, were you surprised? This is Solar Eclipse… well, kind of like one of our trump cards? Unlike earlier, this time, we'll make you ours through sheer force."

Subaru: "You sure are saying some pretty eerie stuff, transgender bastard[217]. You are…"

[217] Subaru here is referring to the fact that Ley was using the plural forms of two typically-male pronouns, "ore" (俺たち) and "boku" (僕たち), whereas now, since getting up, he's using the plural form of a typically-female pronoun, "atashi" (あたしたち). The expression he uses here is "オカマ", which may be used for crossdressers as well, but "transgender" works better in context.

Seized with nightmarish dread, Subaru posed that question whilst sweating cold.

Receiving that, the giant smiled sweetly and without hiding his eccentric ambience, bowed.

???: "——Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, representing Gluttony, Louis Arneb."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "We can't stay for long. By snatching and eating, we must clean up everything, everything, while onii-chan's asleep, you see."

Arc 6 Chapter 67 – Little King

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 5 “An Unreasonable Sword’s Judgment”, Part 3 (heavily changed)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

Witnessing the figure of the man before his eyes ridiculously claim himself to be Louis Arneb, Subaru was at a loss for words.

The man’s way of appearing was unforeseen and unnatural, but what was further unexpected was the name he had given for himself.

It was difficult to conceive it as a mere prank, and even if it were no prank, it yet remained a phenomenon grueling to accept——

Ram: “——Ram did hear something about a shape-shifting Sin Archbishop, it seems that was in regards to this. However, the choice of the form taken is rather questionable, did you think you would receive any mercy by opting for this appearance?”

Louis: “Shapeshifting, huh… Ahhh, you mean that prattling loudmouth woman? Grouping us with that thing hurts even us. Besides, that thing’s principle and our Solar Eclipse’s is totally different. That one would be mimicry, while this is reconstruction.”

Ram: “Mimicry, reconstruction…?”

That mighty body of his wriggling, the interim Louis replied. As he frowned at that answer, hearing Ram mention “another Sin Archbishop” left a bad taste in Subaru’s mouth.

Though it was only to be expected that there would be Sins and Sin Archbishops other than Gluttony in existence, being acquainted with even one of them stemmed into an immediate dislike for all of them.

Though he was supposed to be able to change their forms, it was intriguing why he had not used that ability till now.

Louis: “That being said, this body which is being treated as an unknown person was actually quite a famous person, you know? Though sadly, nee-sama and the others wouldn’t have any memory of the people eaten by us.”

Ram: “Famous person… In other words, you are borrowing the form of an eaten person? Is that so, it truly is the worst kind of thing to do, totally fits you people who have committed themselves to doing evil. Nauseating.”

Louis: “Wow, nee-sama, geez, your words are so dirty they hurt, you know? If you say that then we, who still have memories as your younger sister, will feel ashamed…”

And, that was as far as the interim Louis’s conversation went.

The interim Louis flexibly leaned forward, and from behind came a blow—— a hammer of ice, its strike dodged. Of course, the attacker was——

Emilia: “Ah, dodged!”

Louis: “Huhuhu, how merciless, Emilia-sama! Onii-chan may’ve allowed you to let him get a taste of it, but we won’t allow such an ambush to hit us, you know?”

Emilia: “If it won’t hit, then I’ll just keep attacking till it hits! I don’t even want to ambush you, I just want to strike you down!”

Proclaiming so, Emilia changed the hammer of ice she held in her hands into twin swords of ice and attacked the interim Louis. However, the interim Louis dodged her attack with an extraordinary jump above, and aimed for Emilia’s slender hands from a higher angle,

Louis: “Here!”

Emilia: “Kyaaaaaa!”

Her body sharply rotated; Emilia's frame was thrown off-balance. Emilia twisted her body and used her arms in order to prevent herself from falling on her back. However, the interim Louis aimed straight for her face with his toe.

Should it be too late, then Emilia's face, the cutest in the world, would get squashed—— At that point,

Ram: "Stop ignoring Ram and fighting all by yourself already."

Emilia: "Ram!"

Ram, confirming the movement of the opponent aiming for Emilia's face, pointed the wand held in her own hands towards the face of the interim Louis.

At that moment, an extremely small wind was born, and transforming into a blade, was launched to slice up the opponent's face.

Louis: "——Palm of the Fist King!"

Nullifying Ram's powerful attack with minimal strength using his palm, the interim Louis avoided the damage and then pounced downwards.

His perforating palm received the blade of wind from below, swallowing the wind in its shockwaves, and scattering it subsequently.

Crushing the wind with his right hand, the interim Louis then tried to grip onto Ram with his free left hand. However, by the time his hand reached Ram, the latter had already taken Emilia away with herself out of the opponent's reach, withdrawing to a position where they could mend their handling of the battle.

Louis: "You're doiiiing it!"

Ram: "Hak!"

Clenching his swinging free left hand, the interim Louis applauded Ram's judgement and strength of action. Shaking his praise away with a ridiculing exhale, Ram then pulled Emilia's hand towards herself.

Ram: "Emilia-sama, are you unhurt?"

Emilia: “Y-yes, thank you. It would’ve been pretty painful for me if it wasn’t for Ram saving me. Even so… did you see that just now?”

Ram: “——It seems, they have clearly gotten stronger.”

Ram nodded, gesturing her knowledge upon Emilia’s response.

And, listening to the short dialogue between the two, Subaru also held the same opinion as them.

——Although it had only been a short exchange of moves, the interim Louis’s maneuvers were swift and accurate.

Though it was the opinion of someone inexperienced, these abilities probably exceeded those of Batenkaitos. At the end of that exchange, Ram’s attack had been completely crushed, as if reality were messing around with them.

Louis: “The one right now was the Palm of the Fist King… Named by the one who possessed this body and memory, the Fist King, Neiji Rockhardt. Possessing the strongest palm, capable of blasting away anything, a powerful person without peer in the Gladiator Island.”

Ram: “…It seems that you are not familiar with revealing your strengths. In the end, you are just trying to show that you are at a disadvantage. Ram will not be fooled and hesitate because of this.”

Louis: “We wouldn’t mind that at all, nee-sama! To the point that we want you to corner us if you can! You see, wouldn’t you look back onto the sweet memory of defeat later on?”

Ram: “Who knows. Ram only knows of victory so she doesn’t understand that.”

Louis: “Is that so? That’s just the waste of not knowing the sourness of life.”

The moment he said that, the interim Louis’s figure was scratched out of visibility. It would seemingly be more accurate to say that he had literally disappeared, rather than merely moved swiftly.

Ram: “——!?”

Ram widened her eyes at the enemy’s unexpected move. Even she had been unable to grasp the opponent’s position.

There was no way for her to escape——

Emilia: "——Ram, watch out!"

Saying that, this time it was Emilia who grasped Ram and leapt backwards. Several of Emilia's beautiful silver hairs were too late to escape that attack, as they were caught up in the impact of the strike and were slashed off, scattering around in the aisle.

And, the one visible was not a fast warrior, but instead a bald man, as he laughed with "Haha!".

That man, in possession of a somewhat jumpy appearance and wearing a bright-orange gown, the man smacked his lips at the form of Emilia and Ram fleeing,

Louis: "How nice, so nice, isn't it nice. Can you dodge the next one?"

Emilia: "Kya——"

At that moment, the form of that famous person disappeared into thin air and that of a different one appeared. This seemed as if it were payback for the earlier surprise ambush.

From one blind spot to another, a flashing dagger made accurate attacks energetically. Emilia, while still holding Ram, continued to fend the attacks off with utmost effort.

Louis: "Hahaha! You're doing it, doing it, doing it! How are you seeing through these secret maneuvers of the Leaper, Dorkell? It's truly a mystery!"

Emilia: "That's obvious! I guessed it!"

Ram: "Of course, that is not all to it, there is also Ram's support—— Emilia-sama!"

Emilia: "Yes!"

Flying into a blind spot, the interim Louis launched an attack.

Although the opponent was someone capable of flying around freely, all whilst maintaining that vicious smile, Ram was able to see where he would appear next. On Ram's call, Emilia swung her long legs rapidly.

With that, when the bald man appeared next, Emilia's heel struck his side.

Louis: "Guh…"

Emilia: "Hiyaaah——!!"

Catching her opponent's face with her heel, Emilia did a one-eighty and slammed him onto the ground. At that moment, Emilia held her hand aloft and a pillar of ice rose from the ground; without mercy, she launched the sharp, pointed tip of one towards her fallen opponent.

If the blow were to not be defended away, the strike would penetrate right through his chest, it would make for a truly unpleasant finish. However, unfortunately enough, it was not effective whatsoever.

Emilia: "Eh!?"

Louis: "The skin of the Carnivorous Beast, Beli Heinelga, cannot be pierced, not even by a Holy Sword, is what they used to say."

Shattering the pillar of ice with his bare back, was a middle-aged man with an enormous beard, smiling ferociously.

Lying down, he aimed for Emilia's waist with his arm, which seemed to be more like a log—— and somehow repelling that attack, Emilia made haste and flew, flew, flew backwards.

Emilia: "Uh! Ah! Uh! Hey, at this pace…!"

Ram: "Emilia-sama, please let go of Ram."

Emilia: "No! As if I'll abandon Ram… Mmf."

Ram: "That will not be so."

Emilia escaped from the enemy with Ram in her grip, and Ram sealed her lips by gently placing a finger onto them. Ram shook her head looking at Emilia, whose words she had interrupted,

Ram: "What it means, rather, is that it's about time you let Ram attack as well."

The moment she said that, she swept away Emilia's arms gripping her, and stood firm directly against the giant. Seeing that, the interim Louis smacked his rock-hard lips, and launched his palm towards the young girl.

Louis: "Huhuuu! Get crushed!"

Ram: "Assuming that is even possible, politely say, «please be crushed, Ram-sama»."

With that comeback, Ram charged straight towards the approaching palm. If the situation were to be slightly exaggerated, then it could be said that the palm was enormous enough to crush Ram's entire body.

Recklessly clashing head-on with that palm would be the same as clashing head-on with an approaching car—— at the very least, that appeared to be so in Subaru's eyes.

In response to that, Ram,

Louis: "————"

Ram: "At this level, you should not even think yourself to be able of catching Ram."

At the moment those fingers were about to reach her, Ram, relaxing her lips, dodged the attack with minimal movement, and launched her elbow onto her opponent's face.

That fair elbow, possessing sharpness that could not be imagined given how delicate it was, bore into the snout of her opponent, mercilessly sending shocks through the body of the Carnivorous Beast. And at that moment, Ram's left hand was brought down being employed as a sword, striking at her opponent's Adam's apple which had come into view.

Louis: "——Hk."

Ram: "You have continued to blabber nonsense for quite some time, it is getting irritating now. Embrace your misfortune, and be split asunder by Ram's hand here, you despicable thing of a person."

As she continued to strike at his body's vital points, lacking proper training, the interim Louis faced problems. Ram charged in without any vacillation, this time stabbing at his guts, protected by his bulky surplus of flesh.

And, at the moment its sharp tip became buried in the mass of flesh, thereupon Wind Magic was invoked, and his huge body was easily sent flying backwards.

Subaru: “Strong…!”

Subaru’s eyes went wide, at the sight of the interim Louis splattering blood onto the aisle whilst rolling and bouncing.

Till now, he had concentrated on observing the fight so much that he had forgotten to breathe, but the moment Ram stood upon the battlefield, the flow of the fight was reversed in a flash.

Of course, though all of it was based on the fact that Ram could not drag on battling for too long,

Subaru: “Ram fighting this much is a miscalculation I’m happy for…”

Beatrice: “That, isn’t the case, in fact. You cannot rely on just Ram, I suppose.”

Subaru: “——? What does that…”

Mean, was what Subaru intended to ask Beatrice, who was in his arms, his head tilted. And, before Beatrice could respond to his query the answer itself appeared before him.

Ram: “————”

With a jerk, Ram’s posture, as she tried to step ahead, broke down. Subaru strained his eyes to see whether she had accidentally slipped, but that was not the case.

Ram’s forehead and neck were flooded with sweat, and it was visible that every continuing breath was hurting her.

At that instant, to speak of the likes of prolonging that offensive and defensive battle with lives on the line was nothing but the height of folly; taking the state of affairs from just before into account, the situation faced a change most extreme.

Beatrice: “For a short period of time, then Ram’s sense for combat is unmatched, I suppose. However…”

Subaru: “She has a time limit like that…!? Oh no, Ram——”

Unaware of such a weakness of hers, he had sent Ram into that dangerous situation. At the same time Subaru raised a voice of panic, the interim Louis changed into the form of the muscle-rich huge man once again.

Aiming for the stationary Ram, the enemy moved forward briskly with his palm pointed outwards seeking to make a successful onslaught. If she were to receive a direct hit, it was unknown how much Ram would actually be able to take.

Subaru: “Ram——!”

Louis: “Shut your mumbling, you are so damn loud for a man.”

Subaru called out desperately, but Ram showed no signs of response.

At that moment, the interim Louis’s blow captured Ram’s face directly——

Ram: “Ram understands her own weak points, better than anyone else. That is why——”

Emilia: “I’m fighting alongside Ram!”

Louis: “——Hk!?”

Jumping over the kneeling Ram’s head, with her silver hair fluttering, Emilia moved in the way of her enemy. Against the opponent who had his palm directed towards his own front, the tactics Emilia had chosen were very simple.

The move she had chosen was to have an innumerable number of weapons of ice float in the air, and fire them all towards her opponent at once.

Louis: “Uh, AHHHHHH——!!”

The interim Louis launched off his body, as he had positioned his empty palm, against the rain of ice.

Avoiding, dodging, defending away, destroying, and finally overcoming the scope of the overwhelming storm of ice flawlessly, nothing managed to even scratch the interim Louis. That ability was, again, that of an expert who had achieved heights in proficiency.

The truth was, the Fist King who had been made victim by Gluttony was perhaps a true warrior, who had trained with extreme perseverance to gain such prowess—— That power was now being exploited like this.

The power he had trained to achieve and the fame he had received for being such a great warrior, Gluttony's power had stolen everything away from him, and continued to mock and ridicule his journey of life.

In fact, it was possible that they had achieved new heights in skill, heights which had not been achieved by the original owner of these Memories.

Louis: "Haa!"

He could not help but despair seeing the form of Gluttony, dispelling all of Emilia's attacks and blows with ease, now sighing an exhale of achievement.

Louis: "How nice, this is the best! How do we put it, sort of like, we had completely reconstructed the *catalogue specs* of this Memory but only after we exceeded even that, we felt as if living in this body would be worth it! Sort of feels like we made better use of the borrowed soul compared to its original owner? We're glad we were able to live it!"

Ram: "——Quite the extreme conception for someone with bad taste."

Louis: "Perhaps so! But you see, for us, who are different from normal people, don't you think it's only natural that what we find happiness in would be different too? Don't you think so. Perhaps you think so. Possibly you think so?"

Ram: "Who knows? Isn't that so, Emilia-sama?"

Emilia: "No, you're wrong!"

Prompted by the words of Ram, who shrugged her shoulders, Emilia responded to the interim vicious-looking man—— no, Louis Arneb, whilst letting go the chunks of ice he held in his palm.

Upon receiving that question, Emilia then upheld the spears and axes of ice that rose from the floor,

Emilia: “No matter how different you may be from others, you can still be happy and sad by thinking of the same things! I, for example, was always alone but I enjoyed stacking rocks on river beaches.”

Ram: “…That, as well, feels unique in its own way, though.”

Louis: “We see. Indeed, indeed, we also have memories of stacking rocks on river beaches, but that’s…”

Emilia: “See!”

Louis: “But, we didn’t do it because it was fun. It’s just that there was nothing else to do. There was just no other thing to kill our time with.”

Emilia: “Eh, is that so…?”

Surprised, Emilia made a confused expression, seeing the happiness of her memories get rejected. And, behind Emilia reacting in that way, Ram called out “Emilia-sama” with more strength than normal.

Ram: “Please do not get swayed by the enemy. The opponent is a Sin Archbishop… If they wish to demolish our plans, they will use whatever words necessary. Do not be deceived.”

Emilia: “Is it? Yeah, it is. Yes, I know. I won’t be deceived anymore.”

Louis: “What can we saaay, that was a truly hurtful thing to say. Our one and only nee-sama would leave us behind, so we had no choice but to be doing that.”

Ram: “——Shut up!”

Once again, Ram kicked the frozen floor and launched her body towards Louis, who had repeatedly voiced words which had pierced straight through her heart.

Her body’s condition was not at its best. Well-aware of that, Ram charged straight towards her enemy as to crush them, as to not allow the defilement of that which must not be defiled.

Ram’s intimidating roar pierced straight through Louis. However——

Emilia: “This time I’m with her, so if you want to surrender yourself, this is your chance!”

Louis: “Gratitude for such graciousness, but there’s no need for it!”

Ram: “Enough of your stubbornness!!”

Making a cute expression but using brutal attacks which were not cute in the least, was Emilia. The duo of the enraged Ram and Emilia went in together, however, Louis repulsively kept switching his form and battle style with absolute freedom, controlling the battle’s pace as per his own will.

Subaru: “————”

In this overwhelming duel, there were two things that would surprise anyone observing it.

First, was the masterful coordination between Emilia and Ram.

In the previous loop, Emilia’s Name had been stolen, and because of that her existence had been forgotten and her battle style become unknown to all. Thus, there had been a discrepancy between her and Julius, who was unaware of her style of fighting, however, there was not the slightest of that discrepancy in Emilia and Ram’s case, not even the slightest of lag.

Of course, though it did not mean that the adjustments Emilia made were meaningless, what was of utmost relevance here was Ram’s wonderful sense for combat.

Ram: “Ha——!”

Louis: “Tchhh! Truly, what a nuisance you are, nee-sama!”

Just when he was about to counterattack, her wand was pointed towards his nose and, narrowly dodging the subsequent piercing of the blades of wind, Louis pulled out his tongue.

Although what Ram had performed was not something too substantial, Emilia utilized such gaps to their advantage by further putting pressure on Louis and halting him from counterattacking.

Although her moves were not too showy, Emilia would readily unleash blows towards her opponent at the last second, blows in which she always put her all. That endeavor from her, was something worthy of a commendation.

The breathtaking cooperation between the duo of Emilia and Ram was all thanks to Ram’s judgement. That was one of the things which surprised Subaru the most.

And, there was something else which was equally surprising. That was——

Louis: “Hahaaa! How nice, so nice, very nice, perhaps it is nice, surely it is nice, isn’t it nice, maybe it is nice, probably it is nice, as it is probably nice! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony! Our mood and feelings may be getting higher and higher as well!”

Emilia: “Kuhk! He’s right, his strength is gradually increasing…!”

Ram: “Irritating…!”

Chewing on her own teeth, Emilia launched the twin sword she held in her fist whilst Ram darted a blade of wind aiming for the opponent’s feet. However, Louis, becoming the Fist King, crushed Emilia’s twin sword with his palm; becoming the Leaper, dodged Ram’s attack; becoming the Carnivorous Beast, rolled his body through the passage of ice.

The shockwave he released impacted Emilia and Ram, pushing them backwards as they let out a screech.

Subaru: “————”

The coordination between Emilia and Ram was undoubtedly highly refined. However, as surprising as it seemed, Louis’s prowess in using and switching Memories was even faster.

Possibly, by changing forms, Louis was able to perfectly reconstruct those Memories, with no limitation whatsoever.

——Solar Eclipse, that was indeed what Louis had said.

Before he had lost his body, Batenkaitos—— Louis’s elder brother as well, had copied Emilia’s awesome technique called Ice Brand Arts in the previous loop, but its reconstruction was limited to him maintaining his own form. Louis had exceeded that.

A solar eclipse was a phenomenon in which the sun got hidden behind the moon’s shadow, consequently becoming invisible. Perhaps, Louis’s true body was treated as the sun, which got shadowed by the moon, the reconstructed Name and Memories.

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Setowi (source)

In other words, Solar Eclipse could safely be assumed to be an ability to change one's body into the body of the one whose Memories had been eaten, and therefore fully wield their power as one's own—— Consequent was the Louis before them, using that ability's advantage. And——

Subaru: "If there's Solar Eclipse then it's natural to think that Lunar Eclipse exists too, but what kind of power would come by the hiding of the moon… No, can I even figure it out beforehand?"

On the topic of the usual cliché of there being someone being able of copying abilities, what happened oftentimes was that the user's inexperience and lack of proper knowledge to use those abilities resulted in a discrepancy, becoming a cause of defeat.

However, the Gluttony's copying ability, which obviously would include Louis as well, overcame that weakness perfectly by using "the victim's own body and memories".

It was clear that this was a flawless, perfect copying ability, one that avoided the clichéd method of defeat.

Subaru: "This is bad… If Emilia-chan and the rest get overpowered, the situation will change."

Tightly grabbing his own chest, Subaru gnashed his teeth at the sense of helplessness for being unable to do anything regarding the scene in front of him.

Starting with Emilia and Ram who had engaged in battle against Gluttony, his other comrades had already commenced their own battles at various places in the Tower.

Echidna had evacuated Rem and Patrasche to Taygeta, while Meili went to attend to the large hordes of Witchbeasts surrounding the Tower. And finally, at the Second Floor, the tempestuous movements visible from Julius showed that the state of affairs had changed in quite the dramatic fashion——

Subaru: "——Julius, must be struggling a lot too. On second thought, is his opponent there Reid after all?"

Beatrice: "——Subaru? Just what are you saying, in fact? Where are you looking, at what?"

Subaru: "Where are you looking, and what are you saying, huh, Beatrice. That's…"

Beatrice, within his arms, heard his muttering and looked up, blinking once. She furrowed her brows alongside her murmur laced with lack of understanding; Subaru perceived it all of a sudden, as he was about to reply.

Unquestionably, he would be unable to firmly state what he was saying or looking at right now. But——

Subaru: “What’s… this? I can sense what everyone’s doing and where they are. I can see it?”

Grabbing his chest in a crushing grip, Subaru slowly realized the existence of that feeling—— a feeling of incongruence, upon sensing those blurry, faint dots of light.

They enlightened Subaru regarding the actions of his comrades present in various places within the Tower. He could also sense Ram and the others, and at that moment Subaru accepted this as if it were something natural, like a third arm by birth.

However, this was nothing like being naturally born with a third arm.

The moment he noticed that, Subaru realized just how unnatural this situation was, and a sense of rejection and unacceptability rose within his own heart for his own thoughts.

Subaru: “——Guh.”

However, grinding his molars, he swallowed the thought back in, so that he would not spit it out.

If a third arm had developed out of nowhere at this moment, then he should rightfully accept it, and shake off his feelings of rejection for it.

He was able to get a rough grasp on the whereabouts of everyone, on the situation everyone was in—— In a situation in which all his comrades had to split up, could there be any power more suitable than this? Hence why——

Subaru: “Quickly, silently, belong to me——”

The form of this unnatural power had appeared in concert to Natsuki Subaru’s soul.

What naturally came to his mind was the Hall of Memories, where he had first faced Louis Arneb and the strength that had bloomed within his own body before he left that place.

He had given it a name as well. Yes, that name was——

Subaru: "——Cor Leonis."

The moment he called that name, awareness and control flooded over Natsuki Subaru's soul.

And, the power crowned as "Lion's Heart", rightfully gave the ability—— no, the Authority over itself to Natsuki Subaru. The fruit it bore being,

Subaru: "Nuh, guh… Hk!?"

Beatrice: "Subaru!"

Suddenly, Subaru's feet became unsteady due to the crushing weight of his body. The moment she noticed that, Beatrice shouted in panic, but he was unable to respond due to his headache.

Tinnitus so loud to the point of causing a sudden throbbing headache tormented Subaru's body. What was even worse was the awful fatigue his body was afflicted with, accompanying a tear jerking pain in his bones—— the combination of pain and exhaustion crushed his entire body, making Subaru kneel down instantly.

Subaru: "Gah, ah…"

A voice echoed within his mind, questioning what this was.

The abrupt overwhelming strain on his body was a combination of pain and fatigue; his body felt heavy, as if poisoned, and he was panting like he kept on running after his stamina had exhausted itself.

Rubbing his back, Beatrice panicked due to Subaru's dramatic change. As he felt somewhat eased by the touch of her small palm, Subaru turned his eyes towards the situation.

At that moment, Subaru was trying to properly exercise the Authority that had blossomed within him just now, Cor Leonis.

——No, it felt as if he were merely continuing to exercise it.

His very condition right now as well, was the result of Cor Leonis's usage. If that was so, then just what meaning did that ability hold?

Subaru's body felt leaden, fatigue was increasing, and until now he had done nothing that would——

Indeed, Subaru himself could not do anything. Instead of him——

Louis: "——Ah?"

Out of nowhere, a dry voice echoed, as Louis continued to look while his attack slashed through the sky.

Louis, who yet remained in the form of the Fist King, was showing off his violent combat techniques, overpowering Emilia and Ram, doing with them as per his wishes, as if making sport of them; and right when he was doing so.

Louis's arm was grabbed, and its joint seized in a lock. And,

Ram: "Haaak!"

Without any hesitation or mercy, Ram kneed his joints, breaking Louis's right arm. A repulsive sound echoed, exposing the newly-broken white bones within, as the fibers of his light pink muscles hung down, and the color of blood spread through the frozen white passage, a sight painful to even look at.

Louis: "Higya… Guhk!"

Ram: "Too slow!"

With a revolution, Ram's iron-hard elbow smashed right into the opponent's face. With the same pace, Ram clutched the enemy's hair at the back of his head and smashed him into the wall, whilst continuing to thrust her right fist towards his torso.

When Louis's body, just after the sounds of his ribs cracking echoed, tried to get back onto her, Ram delivered her own kick with an unaccepting expression, and the giant's body rolled at the floor at a fast pace, splattering blood around.

Ram: "…Ram's body feels lighter?"

Clenching her fists, Ram widened her eyes in surprised due to her own body's movements.

Emilia, having been a first-hand witness of her ability and the tremendous fighting prowess in her body, also commented "Amazing…".

Beatrice had been concerned about Ram's fatigue, so Ram's absurd moves right now had cleared away any temporary concerns. —— And that was as far as Subaru's thinking went, before he realized.

Subaru: "This, can't be… could it be, that I took Ram's fatigue?"

Comparing the improvement in Ram's physical condition and the worsening of Subaru's, that indeed seemed to be the case.

Truth was, the lights Subaru was able to sense—— there were two in front of him which seemed to stand for Emilia and Ram, and he could sense something flow into himself from there.

Understanding that that was the position of his comrades, he was indeed taking on their malaise, meaning.

Subaru: "——«Cor Leonis» means, «Lion's Heart»."

The answer to that, lay in Subaru's knowledge of the stars.

Subaru: "————"

The Authority of Greed, which Subaru had unintentionally named "Cor Leonis".

That was, in fact, a Latin expression which meant "Lion's Heart", referring to the star named Regulus, the brightest of the constellation of Leo. However, Regulus also meant something else aside from "Cor Leonis" in Latin, which was "Little King".

——"Lion's Heart" and "Little King".

As lions themselves were called the king of all beasts, the alias of "King" was well-fitting, it was understandable. But, what did the "Little" affixed to it mean?

A little, lion king—— The king of a pride.

What exactly made one deserving of the title of king? That was——

Subaru: "——One who carries everyone's wishes, that's who a King is. That's why."

The Cor Leonis in Natsuki Subaru's possession, would lighten the burden on the back of his comrades.

So that his comrades could fight without restraints, he, as the king of the pride, would take on everything in their stead.

If that was so, then what Natsuki Subaru was supposed to do had been decided.

Subaru: "If I'm spitting blood, then that means the preparations are all okay."

Beatrice: "Subaru?"

Subaru: "My bad, I made you worry. My head just hurts a bit, my legs feel strained, my joints ache like all hell, my hands and feet feel like they've been victim to some sneak attack, but I'm alright."

Beatrice: "Sneak attack!? When, where, I suppose!?"

Subaru: "Probably when I wasn't looking at the fight."

He was unable to explain it clearly to Beatrice, whose eyes were filled with concern.

However, the source for the pain in his hands and legs was him hiding the wounds taken by either Emilia or Ram, having suffered those at the hands of Louis.

And, Subaru did not mutter a single word about the weight of the injuries he was carrying for them.

Because, for some reason, a person like that seemed to be cooler.

Subaru: "Just like this…"

If Ram were able to keep using her abilities like this, and keep up with Louis, they might manage to actually overcome Gluttony, unlike how they had failed last time.

Win against Louis, and hurry to catch up to Julius who was fighting Reid, or in worst-case scenario, face the titanic scorpion and the shadow——

Subaru: “——?”

Thinking that far, Subaru looked at the existence of the lights within his chest yet again.

One was Julius, battling on a floor above the one Subaru and the others were on, and another was Meili, confronting the hordes of Witchbeasts from the balcony. Echidna and her group seemed to have safely evacuated to Taygeta, these were the ones whose positions could very well be felt by Subaru. However——

Subaru: “——This one, who is that?”

At a point distanced away from them all, Subaru could feel the existence of a light at the same floor he was in, approaching from the direction opposite to him.

That was the direction the dignified Reid had first appeared from in the previous loop. Wishing for it to not be Reid, Subaru confirmed the presence of certain confidence within him, as he looked on with a modicum of hesitation. And——

Subaru: “Beatrice!”

Beatrice: “——Hk! Minya!!”

Once he pointed towards the other side of the corridor and raising a shout, Beatrice instantly came to notice the abnormality, and widened her palm. At that very moment, shining purple crystals were born as the consequence of her chant.

Floating in the air with terrifyingly sharp tips, they were fired like bullets from a gun the subsequent instant. They flew above the heads of Emilia, Ram and Louis all, who were fighting in the aisle, going further beyond.

And there, it collided with an attack which was aiming right for Emilia’s back.

???: “————”

As an excruciating sound of shattering glass echoed, a blinding white light broke through and exposed the white corridor to itself. Amidst the sparkles of the shattered ice and crystals, a shimmering red light was visible in-between the darkness.

As soon as he laid his eyes on it, the pain in Subaru's heart multiplied several times. Once again, the threat repeated itself, further worsening the situation.

However, at this point, the pain in his heart was not because of seeing that dot of red light.

The red dot of light, and the faint light Subaru could sense within his chest—— which showed him the position of his comrades, overlapped.

That could mean, only one thing.

Subaru: "What does… this mean? You…"

???: "————"

Swinging its tail which wielded a long and sharp needle, emerging from the blackness was the gigantic shadow, clad in an armor-like black shell over its body—— the form of the titanic scorpion.

However, at this moment, the scorpion's appearance held a totally different meaning for Subaru.

For the existence which had revealed itself there was——

Subaru: "——Is it you, Shaula!?!?"

Facing a reality he did not want to face, accepting a truth he did not want to accept, Subaru called out in a voice mixed with rage and despair.

Hearing that voice, the scorpion, lacking a mouth with which to respond with words, lifted its enormous pincers aloft, and clanked them, as if affirming his words.

A clank echoed.

Arc 6 Chapter 68 – The Woman of Scorpius

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 5 “An Unreasonable Sword’s Judgment”, Part 4

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——When he had first heard of Shaula’s name, it was not as if he had thought nothing of it.

It was not because he possessed some emotional attachment to the name “Shaula”.

It was because Subaru had memories of that word.

Shaula, was the name of a star which glowed in the night sky Subaru was acquainted with—— a term meaning Scorpius.

To think the true identity of the one who took upon the name of the Scorpius would be the scorpion clad in a jet-black shell, that answer was something truly straightforward and simple. So straightforward, that one would actually grow suspicious of the one who chose that name.

However, at present, the first candidate for that lack of sense was the one she referred to as “Master”, Natsuki Subaru.

The problem here was how unlikely it was that Subaru had gotten the chance to bestow her with that name, regardless of the presence or absence of his Memories, and how they had no leeway to confirm that right now.

Subaru: “————”

Before his eyes, the tag-team of Emilia and Ram continued their fierce battle with the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Louis Arneb. Interposing in the space of that battlefield, in the interior of the aisle, the jet-black titanic scorpion let out a fiendish sound by clanking its huge pincers, staring towards them with deep-red compound eyes.

The ominous huge pincers had evolved for the purpose of slaughter, wielding such sharpness that gave rise to the conjecture that they possessed enough strength to easily cleave bones and internal organs of the human body alike with a single clank of its edges.

Red compound eyes, two ominous gigantic pincers, multiple legs supporting its large frame, a shell boasting the strength of armor of iron, all of them were symbols of refinement for the purpose of destruction and violence.

And in truth, its fighting strength did not contradict the sense of ferocity its outer appearance let off.

Time and time again throughout this conflict, throughout what he had seen in this world until now, Subaru had confirmed that with his very eyes; rather, he himself had experienced that personally on his own flesh.

Subaru: “Ah…”

The moment that realization spouted within him, certain happenings of a previous loop appeared before Subaru.

Having driven away the brutal attack of the titanic scorpion, the moment they thought they had somehow managed to make it withdraw temporarily, Subaru and the others had been bathed by the explosion caused by the parting gift of that evil beast, resulting in Beatrice and Echidna both being deprived of their lives.

The intolerable rage he felt back then, was something he was incapable of forgetting.

The wrath he embraced directed resentment towards the powerlessness of his own self, and at the same time, he could not suppress the rage he felt towards the titanic scorpion who had been behind that slaughter.

——The subject of that wrath, the titanic scorpion, its true identity had been of one who was supposedly his comrade, Shaula.

Now that he knew that, what occupied Subaru’s heart was merely a violent maelstrom of emotion with nowhere to go, alongside questions.

Why, had Shaula taken the form of the titanic scorpion.

Why, was Shaula attacking Subaru and the others, and trying to kill them.

Why, did Shaula reveal her true nature at this stage of the game, and was interrupting the battle.

Why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why——

Beatrice: "——Subaru, calm down, in fact. First, take deep breaths, I suppose."

Subaru: "————"

Subaru was tormented by such thoughts after greeting such shocking truths. The one to call Subaru's name softly, as he remained in that state, and restore him back to sanity, was Beatrice, standing next to him.

With his hand grasped by her tiny palm, Subaru noticed for the first time, that he had forgotten to even breathe. Abiding by her command, Subaru slowly inhaled deeply, then exhaled. And,

Beatrice: "That's fine, in fact—— Is it true, that that thing is Shaula, I suppose?"

At Beatrice's question, once again, Subaru affirmed to himself.

Cor Leonis—— though his Authority, a characteristic unique to him, had just blossomed within him and he had only recently managed to get a grasp on it, it conveyed the whereabouts of his comrades to Subaru and took over the inferiorities in the physical form of allies, that alone was unquestionable.

Henceforth, Subaru could vaguely catch onto the locations of all his comrades within the Tower, Emilia, Ram, Beatrice, Julius, Meili and Echidna.

And that faint, warm sensation he could feel from those comrades of his, he could feel the same from the titanic scorpion.

If the relative positions of all his comrades within the Towers were to be considered, no other candidate came to mind.

Henceforth, that titanic scorpion was unmistakably——

Subaru: “It’s Shaula for sure. I don’t know why, but, she’s turned into a huge scorpion…”

Beatrice: “——It’s true that she was a girl whose true identity was uncertain in the first place, in fact. That true identity being that of a slightly big bug isn’t even worthy of astonishment, I suppose.”

Subaru: “That’s quiiite the amazing courage you have…”

Asserting the scorpion to be a mere bug, Beatrice warded it off with not the ability to comprehend but the ability to respond to the call. Coiling his tongue at that approach of coping with the situation, Subaru at that moment glared at the titanic scorpion for once.

Red compound eyes with the aim of their gaze unknown, stabbed by the scowl coming from the opposite direction,

Subaru: “How about you give some answers! Your true identity has been uncovered already, you bastard!!”

Shaula: “————”

Subaru: “Making excuses or flicking your tongue before the prey, there must be something you have to do… Hk.”

When he raised his harsh voice, he felt his head ache from the heavy atmosphere and his weakened physical state. However, Subaru ignored that pain and sought a response from the titanic scorpion.

However, the titanic scorpion, maintaining its outward appearance which suggested an inability of will and communication, never even once tried to respond.

Subaru: “Are you… not going to make a single excuse…”

Murmuring powerlessly, Subaru thought while fighting his urge to vomit.

As per the memories he had recalled earlier, Subaru had been made to taste hardships time and time again by this titanic scorpion.

With unruly naivete, the one who had continued to show her courtesy and affection to Subaru without ever attempting to conceal it, Shaula—— having been cheated by her, deceived by her, that truth piercingly stabbed through his chest.

How her smile, her words, her attitude, anything and everything, had been made-up fakes.

How she had deceived Subaru and others, turning out to be a traitor.

Subaru: “No…”

Traitor, sadly expressing that notation, Subaru stiffened his cheeks with a dicey sense of unease.

Shaula betrayed them—— That thought itself was a conclusion which could not be helped, considering the existing situation. However, whether everything relating to Shaula had truly been fiction or not, had room for argument.

Of course, it was plausible that all of Shaula’s words and deeds until now had been acting, that her smile, bonding, anything and everything had all been naught but swindles for deceiving them.

It was plausible. But, for what——?

Had she intended to crawl into Subaru and the rest’s trust through her acting, her intentions would pose her as an opponent to Subaru and the rest.

However, had Shaula aimed for that, she must have obtained chances to chop off their sleeping heads time and time again, even without having to do something like diving into battle at this stage of the game.

And it was precisely that; while she crawled into gaining such deep trust from Subaru and the others, she must have had infinite chances to slowly and secretly poison them as well.

Having missed those chances, why had she only disclosed her betrayal now?

Such a thing could never be rational in any way.

Going out of her way and putting up a dubious pretense, then becoming a comrade for Subaru and the others, what could be the point of all that?

Listening to Subaru's requests and even cooperating in stopping Meili, displaying hyper magic against the hordes of Witchbeasts from the balcony, it was unknown what meaning all that held.

None of it made any sense, did it not?

Subaru: "The reason why I ended up thinking that, is it because I got mesmerized for seeing her fair legs in those hot pants of hers?"

Beatrice: "If your thoughts on her are growing softer because of that, then Shaula's plan hasn't been discarded completely, in fact.

Subaru: "Right. My feelings are aligned with Emilia-chan… Ah, wahh!"

Just when they felt unison discomfort towards Shaula's conduct, he suddenly had his arm pulled by Beatrice. It was not objection, but an action of overbearing extrication.

Above Subaru's head, who stumbled a couple steps forward to stop himself from falling, a white corona zipped by; he survived by a hair.

Beatrice: "It seems… there's no time to sit and chatter, I… suppose!"

While saying that, raising the hand opposite to the one grasping Subaru's own, Beatrice's environs gleamed faintly.

Alongside the violet light they were clad in, what emerged were sharpened pointed tips, in large numbers. As if enclosing Subaru and Beatrice, the violet arrows unfolded, facing the titanic scorpion directly, and were shot.

At that moment, the white corona came flying towards them as well, and, clashing with the violet arrows, light performed a boisterous dance.

Subaru: "UOOOOH!?"

Beatrice: "Duck, in fact! It won't be good if you receive a direct hit, in fact!"

The glittering violet light raged on and a sound like that of shattering glass beautifully chained through the aisle.

On the other side of the spectacle where the glitter seemingly grilled his eyes, the flash fired by the titanic scorpion—— no, by the sharp stinger, had been established to take away Subaru's life without mercy.

That single needle advancing with the intent to kill was warded off, repelled, brushed aside by the hundred arrows stemming from the magic Beatrice had woven for protection.

However, the consumption of resources had been overwhelming.

Beatrice: "Guh, not good, in fact…! At this rate, our Mana will be exhausted in no time, I suppose…!"

Subaru: "What'll happen if it's exhausted!?"

Beatrice: "Betty and Subaru will get pierced through by that single needle together, in fact!"

Being together aside, he could not come to accept that circumstance.

Against the onslaught of attacks, Beatrice's remaining strength could not last for long, that was what she had reported herself. With their circumstances continuing to deteriorate, there was a need to somehow overcome the situation before they were crushed.

And at the moment immediately after Subaru gritted his teeth due to the impending sense of crisis——

Emilia: "——Swishing that right above someone's head is dangerous, you know!"

The sound of silver bells chimed potently, and a large rock of ice energetically struck the shell of the titanic scorpion. A hammering sound echoed throughout the passage, surprise apparently reflected in the emotionless compound eyes of the scorpion.

The one who had managed to draw out that reaction was the one who had created a wall of ice in the aisle and subsequently kicked it, decisively plunging it into the bosom of the scorpion, Emilia.

Her silver hair fluttering, leaping upon the scorpion with magnificence, she wielded a longsword of ice,

Emilia: "Targeting Subaru and Beatrice… Bullying the weak shows you are a coward!"

Shaula: "————"

With the slash of the sword of frost capable of cutting down anything with a single swing, she brushed away the large pincers and the titanic scorpion made a speedy withdraw using its multiple legs, wriggling like a worm. However, Emilia pursued the retreating large build, and thus commenced the three-dimensional battle between the beauty and the scorpion within the cramped aisle.

Emilia: “Hiyah! Eyah! Uyaaah!”

A longsword, twin swords, a lance, a large hammer hence given shape to were smashed giving rise to a light report, and the falling, glittering ice shards fluttered around the gracefully dancing Emilia.

The potent pincers of the titanic scorpion, the strength they had was their highlight, as they easily stopped the blow of their enemy by shattering their weapons, herculean cutting strength concealed in them. However, that destruction of weapons would not work on Emilia.

Emilia’s Ice Brand Arts was an ability capable of creating countless weapons through her magical power.

The disposable weapons of ice were no greater than trifling articles to Emilia. No matter how many times were they to be smashed, shattered, neither were of any concern to Emilia.

Emilia: “Hi, yaaah!!”

The pincers and tail stinger waved about and Emilia, dodging them, launched a picket of ice floating midair. It collided head-on with the white luster shot by the scorpion, resulting in light scattering across.

That was the overwhelming battle of offense and defense of the two, one human and one inhuman.

What was worth admiring was Emilia’s sense against an enemy who required being dealt with in a way different from the one used against people, having jumped in without any hesitation whatsoever and continued hanging on.

For Emilia, who readily took upon a battle style of instinct, the form and shape of the enemy were not an absolute article. It was not the accumulation of strict disciplining, but the sense for combat abundant within her body, that which told her of her enemy.

Henceforth, the battle between Emilia and the titanic scorpion was taking alternately favorable and unfavorable turns, gaving rise to a stalemate.

However, with Emilia fighting the titanic scorpion, another on-going battle was unable to avoid remaining unchanged.

Even if that battle had commenced with an attack by the both of them at the same time, the exchange of blows with the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, with Louis Arneb—— had been left to Ram alone.

Subaru: “Ram!!”

Ram: “I can hear you, there is no need to shout every second. Shut up. As it dampens my spirit.”

Upon Subaru’s voice, who had been fearful regarding her, she responded with an outrageously cruel reply.

Ram confronted Louis in the middle of the aisle all by herself. With her back turned to where Subaru was at, she clashed head-on with the large build exerting tremendous pressure.

Of course, with Emilia’s departure, the battle had taken a turn for the worse, Subaru was able to see that, but——

Ram: “Shk!”

Louis: “Higyaa! Nee-sama is just so harsh, so harsh!”

With a smile glued to his face, the large man, shaking his head about, soared backwards.

Having taken an elbow strike to the face, his retreat was to disperse its impact. Faced with the large build doing so, Ram sharply gyrated her body and commenced a resolute offense at extremely close quarters with the expert who had named himself as the “Fist King”.

The unarmed martial arts Louis was using had been endowed with immeasurable bloodshed befitting the name of “Fist King”. However, through merely her aberrant sense, Ram was somehow overpowering those fighting techniques which had been taken to the extremities.

Even now, she lunged a fair fist of hers, firing it into the median line of the enemy mercilessly.

Louis: “How amazing! So amazing! Isn’t it amazing, isn’t it too amazing! Nee-sama is just too strong, much more than what we knew! What’s this, what’s this, why are you able to move so well!?”

Ram: “Don’t talk as if you know anything, kindly keep quiet and die.”

Bathing in the vehement impact, passing his comment while somewhat writhing in pain, was Louis.

By now, Louis had gotten his right arm broken, that one arm had been nullified. In that state, even in the body of a man who had mastered unarmed combat, it would not be possible to bring out those capabilities.

The experience points of the martial arts cultivated within the Fist King amounted to naught in face of a Ram who had been released from her inferior physical form.

The inborn natural capabilities possessed by Ram had were capable of overwhelming her enemies to such an extent.

However, as Ram continued to put up a tough fight, the harder she fought——

Subaru: “Guh, buh.”

Welling up of nausea, limitless rise in temperature. Within his head, the seemingly cursing noise of gongs being struck buzzed in his ears accompanied with a headache; whilst experiencing this, Subaru fought against getting distracted and letting his guard down.

This was the horrendous state that Ram would feel and experience on a regular basis.

It was now mercilessly scraping off Subaru’s mind and body with a rasp. Whether it was possible to get used to it or not, the chills continued getting more and more intense with each passing second, and, as Ram’s voltage rose, their intensity rose accordingly as well.

Subaru: “————”

However, that nausea, that headache, that sense of fatigue, Subaru patiently endured them by clenching his molars.

Thanks to this Authority, he could take on Ram’s suffering and grant her the strength to fight. At this point, the recoil of Subaru having to suffer was a compensation he must accept and pay.

His entire body felt heavy, his limbs were creaking, his ears were hurting due to the noise, his torn thighs were aching, his struck and damaged abdomen was screaming in agony, his rate of breathing was rising because of the depletion of all his strength, his vision flickered in red and white.

——He should simply bluff and show that this much was of no concern.

Ram: "——Truly a fool."

And, glancing towards Subaru who had bent down behind Beatrice, Ram's lips seemingly faintly murmured something.

However, the Authority was only capable of taking on the burden, it could not convey everything regarding the partner.

The lightly whispered words went unheard, and the only result they bore was Subaru furrowing his eyebrows. However——

Ram: "Kindly collapse already. If you drag this on for too long, the ones charged with our household chores will all faint."

Louis: "How cold, so cold, isn't it cold, because it is so cold! Nee-sama, nee-sama! Let's play more! Let's have fun! Even though we're sisters, we've never even once engaged in a bout like this, haven't we!"

Ram: "——Then, your wish shall be granted."

Narrowing her cold eyes, Ram struck the side of the frolicking Louis's face with her palm.

At the same pace, as if in flow she elbowed the same side, then rotated swiftly while drilling countless blows on the entirety of Louis's body.

Louis turned completely on the defensive; delivering an upwards blow onto his jaw with palm directly underneath it, Ram grabbed her opponent's collar and forcefully bashed his face onto the wall beside them, and thereafter drove her lovely knees into his head.

Louis: "Puh, gah."

With his face caught between the bare wall and the knee, Louis had his nose crushed as he collapsed, bleeding. Towards that Louis's naked nape, Ram turned her palm relentlessly.

Within that palm was whirling an extremely minute blade of wind. However, it should not be underestimated due to its size. The swirl of the wind blade formed in her palm contained enough potency to gouge out any vitals of the body.

Grand destruction was unneeded, a minimalistic attack to merely gouge out the vitals of the body and slay the enemy. Were a neck to take it, regardless of how thick the neck of even the Fist King may be, he would still be equally helpless.

And, Ram's attack settled the battle——

???: "——Geez, alwaaays doing things as you please when someone's sleeping. This is why youngest little sisters can't be selfish. As an elder sibling yourself, nee-sama must also agree, right?"

Ram: "——Hk."

The moment when the strike was trained at the nape, the Fist King's form changed, and Ram's palm missed its aim.

The moment initially afterwards, what seized Ram's petite torso from the front was the brutal backwards kick from someone with a strikingly short height, Louis—— no, from Ley Batenkaitos.

Subaru: "*Kawari*[218]…!?"

Ley: "That's not not not not not it! It wasn't something we were aiming for and then did it or anything, by sheer chance, the moment we opened our eyes, little sister was in an unfavorable position, that's all. Onii-san can understand, right? The feeling when your bro's so bad at the game being played that you can't stand it and end up taking away the controller?"

Languidly stretching out his tongue, Ley, a vicious actor of dark-brown hair, smiled at Subaru.

[218] Engrish flip. Means "replacement" (代わり), originally "スイッチ" (switch). Kinda done in the sense of "they switched!?", here.

With that evil smile of Ley's, Ram, who had received the fierce kick directly in her guts, had been pushed backwards to an immense distance. And, she distorted her cheeks and expression at that singular counterattack, then inhaling a rough and large breath.

At the same time, Subaru took over the cause of what had stopped her in her tracks through the Authority. And——

Subaru: "Guh, GYAAAAAAAAAH!"

Burning pain sprung forth in his abdomen, its heat so scorching it was unbearable, thus Subaru let out a scream.

He was tormented by that extreme pain, it seemed as if his guts had been stirred and damaged with a blazing hot rod of iron. His field of vision whitening due to the shock, he understood that his internal organs within were all screeching in unison.

Ley: "Huh? Just as we thought. So it was thanks to onii-san that nee-sama, for whom it should be impossible to move, was able to move! Geez nee-sama, in the time your little sister wasn't there you deepened your relationship with the one your little sister had feelings for!?"

Blurting out nonsense, while looking at Subaru screaming, Ley struck the floor with his heel. At his feet, peeking out from his heel was a hidden blade of short length; its sharp tip had been soaked with Ram's blood.

She had been stabbed. Subaru had taken up that pain and was now suffering with it.

Or perhaps, given this scorching heat, the blade may have been varnished with poison or something. His body temperature degraded at such vigor that it made him shiver, and immense sweat started to flow all over his body.

Beatrice: "Subaru!?"

Ram: "Barusu, kindly stop!"

Beatrice was astonished upon Subaru's screech and Ram shouted, seemingly having made sense of the situation.

Having been stabbed, the wound in her abdomen was letting out massive amounts of blood originating from the guts. It was natural to feel malaise if by the loss of blood, but it still had no effect on movement, as the pain was being relieved. However, Subaru desperately shook his head.

He could not return this agony to Ram. The moment he returned it, Ram would be rendered immobile.

It was an obvious flow. It was best if their pain settled upon Subaru. If that were to be done, everyone would still be able to continue without losing. They could fight. He must assist those who were fighting.

Subaru: “Not yet…”

Ram: “Beatrice-sama! Kindly take Barusu and stand back! He is only an obstruction!”

Because of Subaru’s condition, his voice seeming like incoherent murmuring, Ram prompted her quick judgement.

She rolled the tunic she had taken off around her wound in the guts, thus trying to stop the bleeding, and on top of that decided to continue the battle. In exchange for that, she urged Beatrice to have Subaru withdraw from this place.

Beatrice abided by Ram’s judgement, and pulled Subaru’s sleeve.

Beatrice: “Subaru, it’s just as how Ram says, I suppose! For now, get away from this place, and…”

Subaru: “T-that won’t do…! If I, get away from here…”

Shaking his head towards Beatrice who was pulling his sleeve, Subaru attempted to remain in this place.

If he were to get away from this theater right now, the effect of Cor Leonis may get cut off, and the situation of the battle Ram was managing would break down straight away.

If that happened, then what would be the point of having Subaru withdraw from here?

Ram: “Kuh…! Emilia-sama! Come over here at once!

Emilia: “Eh? Ah, hm! I get it!”

Looking at Subaru attempting to remain at that place, Ram called upon Emilia.

At that call, Emilia, who had been concentrating on her battle with the titanic scorpion flew a long distance backwards. The titanic scorpion tried to go after her, but that pursuit was hindered by a humongous ice wall which seemingly covered the aisle.

Of course, the ice wall could stand for not more than a single second faced with the titanic scorpion's pincers, but that single second was sufficient for Emilia's retreat. And there——

Ley: "Woahwoahwoah, just a second just a second just a second! Even if you come back with such energy, did you think we'll just say «ah is that so» and overlook you…"

Ram: "——Keep quiet!"

Ley: "Whoops."

Ley, slurping on his tongue, swung his dagger towards the retreating Emilia's back. Ram, closing in unnoticed with a low stance, brushed it away splendidly by sweeping him with her legs.

And Emilia flew over Ley's head, the latter lying on his back, as if jumping over a hurdle. The result of that, as Ley stood in the aisle——

Shaula: "————Bishaaan!"

Ley: "Tchhh! Hahaha! Well well, aren't you doing it!"

The titanic scorpion, trying to pursue Emilia, viciously clashed with Ley who had been left alone in the battle theater. Though the compound eyes of the titanic scorpion were originally turned towards Subaru, even still, there was no way it could simply ignore the one standing in-between as an obstruction without acting towards him.

The pincers of the titanic scorpion swung, and Ley warded them off with miraculous swordsmanship using his daggers. Though the brittle blades seemed that they would get shattered easily by a single strike, Ley's ability was able to do that extremely easily.

With that, glancing backwards, seeing as how the enemy collided with the enemy,

Ram: "Emilia-sama! Take Barusu!"

Emilia: “Leave it to me!”

Hearing Ram’s shout as she dashed from the aisle, Emilia held the crouching Subaru in her arms like a baby. Shouldered by Emilia’s slender arms, Subaru gave rise to a surprised voice saying “Woah!”,

Emilia: “I’m sorry, stay put for a second, okay!”

Subaru: “Being carried by a girl, my *kyouji*’s[219] hurt…”

Ram: “There’s no way there’s any pride even left to be hurt at this point. Kindly stay put and let yourself be treated like luggage!”

Emilia’s speed did not decrease even slightly whilst shouldering Subaru, who had blurted such thoughtless comments.

Behind them unfolded the clash between Ley and the titanic scorpion, and regardless of what the conclusion of it should become, the two would surely be obstructing each other’s way for some time for the moment. With that being said——

Beatrice: “——Shaula must be aiming for Subaru, in fact. If you take your eyes off it and lose sight of where it may come from, it’ll be dangerous, I suppose!”

Ram: “That is the problem, Beatrice-sama—— Is that thing, really Shaula?”

Running alongside Emilia who was shouldering Subaru, Ram and Beatrice exchanged thoughts on the situation.

Ram’s question was a demand for confirmation of the titanic scorpion’s identity, which Subaru was assured of. Hearing that, Beatrice gave a sidelong glance to Subaru and nodded,

Beatrice: “That’s what Subaru believes, in fact. That attack of firing light also matches up, I suppose.”

Ram: “…The attack seen at the balcony, at the time we left the Sand Dunes, is it.”

[219] Engrish flip. Means “pride (in the sense of dignity)” (矜持), originally “プライド” (pride).

Hearing Beatrice's analysis, Ram furrowed her eyebrows. She then glanced towards Subaru, as he was carried in Emilia's arms, striking his forehead,

Ram: "Barusu, whatever you are doing, undo it. At this rate…"

Subaru: "I-I'll have to endure it? I'll say this, I'm a man, you know. Enduring and being patient, is the special right of us men…"

Ram: "Quite a thing to say, being in such a tattered state and being carried by Emilia-sama."

Subaru: "Uguhhh."

At Ram's words, he was unable to voice even "Ugh" properly.

The truth was, due to the effect of taking over Ram's inferior physical form, even breathing languidly was painful for him. The burden increased each passing second and the exhaustion felt as if it were some curse that would eat away his life.

At the strong act being put up by Subaru, Emilia whispered "As I thought",

Emilia: "Subaru, you're doing something, right? Midway through, my body also became reaaally light, and the parts where I was damaged and wounded didn't hurt either… Beatrice, if you're having Subaru push himself…"

Beatrice: "It's not Betty, in fact. Subaru is doing this himself… through an Authority, I suppose. Even Betty wants to stop him if he can be stopped, in fact."

Emilia: "Authority…?"

Towards Emilia, who had offered her frank advice, Beatrice denied her involvement and made an astringent face. Emilia and Ram furrowed their eyebrows together in response to what she had pronounced.

Calling it an Authority, Beatrice gave the impression that she had an inkling about the power Subaru was using——

Ram: "Beatrice-sama, what would be an Authority?"

Beatrice: "——Something like, the backwards compatibility[220] of a Divine Protection, I suppose. Subaru is pushing himself quite a bit and using it, in fact. That is the cause behind Emilia and Ram's states as well, I suppose."

"————"

Hearing that, Emilia inhaled while Ram sharpened her gaze.

Though she was physically supposed to be fine, what dwelled in Ram's light-crimson eyes was powerful rage. With such eyes, she glared at Subaru,

Ram: "Taking up Ram's burden as how you please, when did you become so admirable?"

Subaru: "My bad… I'm a gentleman. That's why, I end up smartly taking the girls' luggage…"

Ram: "And as a result of that, you become a girl's luggage in turn? It can be said countless times, you've got it backwards."

Ram's continued sighs somewhat felt as if she had given up on Subaru's attitude. She must have understood as well, that Subaru had no intentions of returning that burden.

Honestly speaking, possessing it forever would be tiresome, but even so, at least while they were in the middle of the conflict——

Subaru: "——That's… it."

Thinking that far, at last, Subaru finally turned his consciousness towards—— not the internal organs within the depths of his abdomen, but at something else.

His consciousness passed through the body of what was his self, and largely spread out to the scope perceivable to him. And, grasping onto Cor Leonis, he connected to the conditions and positions of his comrades.

[220] The expression used here, "上位互換", is very difficult to translate correctly given more context is needed on the origins of Authorities. It seems that, aside from the aspect of backward compatibility, it can also be employed as slang to express the idea of "providing the same function but better", which may be more understandable here.

Without any change, in Taygeta were Echidna and Rem, along with Patrasche. Slightly away from them was Gian, at a lower floor, and then——

Subaru: “I knew it.”

Emilia: “I knew it? What did you know?”

Subaru: “Meili is obstructing the Witchbeasts from the balcony even now…”

Though faintly distant, the flickering, blurry light on the balcony of the Fourth Floor was Meili. Though the situation was that Shaula had made herself absent, she was mobilizing her own strength as to deal with the large hordes of Witchbeasts.

He held the deepest admiration for the strenuous efforts she was making, and he felt grateful as well——

Beatrice: “Meaning, that girl wasn’t attacked by Shaula, in fact.”

Subaru: “Exactly.”

Subaru affirmed what Beatrice had stated, the latter on top of Emilia’s shoulders.

The moment immediately after the battles had broken out in each of the respective places, Subaru had left dealing with the Witchbeasts advancing towards the Watchtower to the duo of Meili and Shaula.

Thereafter, with Shaula making her appearance in the form of the titanic scorpion to attack Subaru and the rest, logically, Meili’s well-being, who was supposed to be with her, became a matter of concern—— but Subaru could feel her safety. In other words,

Subaru: “Shaula turned into that after parting with Meili. At any rate, Shaula hasn’t laid a finger on Meili…”

How relevant was that to the present situation, he could not think about that with an exhausted mind.

On top of that, even if they continued running at this rate——

Emilia: “We need to solve the problems popping up, otherwise we’ll just get cornered no matter how much we run!”

With a shout similar to a cry, Emilia perfectly expressed the present condition of Subaru and the others.

The first of the five problems, the hordes of Witchbeasts, as destined for Meili, the titanic scorpion and Gluttony were still attempting to devour each other, and he felt no signs of the arrival of the jet-black shadow.

However, Reid Astrea, equipped with violence akin to the absurd iron hammer of the divine, was——

Ram: "——Hk, please stop!"

Everyone: "——!?"

Ram, who was running and leading the vanguard, stretched her hand towards the rear and halted Emilia and the rest. In front of the momentarily stopped group of three, a piercing shockwave flew by the following instant.

The shockwave diagonally bisected the aisle seemingly made of stone, creating an entrapment of rubble and smoke.

Seeing the destruction of the Watchtower which had professed itself as indestructible, taking into account Subaru's memories, this would be the third time—— but if being crushed by the shadow was to be kept out of the picture, this would be the first.

And, the true identity of that destruction was——

???: "Miss Ram… along with Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama, is it?"

Subaru: "Julius!?"

Evading the eruption of smoke, flying backwards a great distance, was a figure with a white outfit contaminated by blood and dust; the good-looking man, Julius Juukulius.

Stepping onto that place and dispersing the shockwave, he quickly turned his yellow eyes backwards and glanced into the dark-colored eyes of Subaru, atop Emilia's shoulders,

Julius: "Though I believe it has only been a few minutes since we parted ways, it seems you were damaged quite harshly, have you not?"

Subaru: “Shut up… For once, I’m unhurt.”

Julius: “I do not see the cold sweat of an unhurt human, though…”

Julius closed a single eye at Subaru, the latter with a pallid face, blurting rough words amidst faint breaths. Even he, who possessed good judgement, had not been able to understand the effects of the Authority of Cor Leonis, as expected.

And unfortunately, no longer remained any time for them to calm down and converse about it.

Subaru: “I’m begging you, please say you slashed Reid’s throat…”

Julius: “Reporting what differs from reality, is an extraordinarily difficult choice as a Knight.”

Beatrice: “…That, already makes for the answer, I suppose.”

Subaru’s wish, which seemed more like a prayer, had been implicitly repudiated by the excessively serious response. While feeling his hope turn into despair, Subaru made a bitter expression.

He felt his earbuds hurt, due to the sound of *zori*[221] stepping firmly upon the wall’s fragments,

???: “Hah! So ya’re greetin’ all the women ya’ve gathered in here, ya prick. It was just startin’ to get a bit borin’ after walkin’ ’round freely. So are y’all gonna be my opponents, aye?”

Ram: “…The worst development.”

Following Julius, the one who showed his form through the smoke was the tall man with long red hair, casually dressed on only a single side, his figure built with muscularity—— red violence, Reid Astrea.

At the form of Reid, boldly stepping into the aisle of the Fourth Floor and not the Second Floor, Ram commented with a low voice. With identical astonishment, Emilia let out a “You…” with a quivering voice,

Emilia: “Why are you on this floor? Aren’t you supposed to be unable to leave that place…”

[221] Traditional sandals from Japanese, similar to flip-flops. For more information, see here.

Reid: “Oioi, don’t’cha be makin’ me laugh, smokin’ hottie. I live where I wanna live, slash down those whom I wanna slash down, and sleep with women I wanna sleep with. As if I’ll be abidin’ by the customs of others.”

Beatrice: “…Just how cheap is this guy, in fact.”

Beatrice, while trembling with fear, smacked her lips at Reid’s self-centered philosophy.

However, it was a fact that Reid had appeared in this place, standing in the way of Subaru and the others, obstructing them.

With this, they had Reid at the front gate, and Gluttony and the titanic scorpion at the back gate[222]—— This was a massive tribulation.

Subaru: “Though it may be useless to just talk… Right now, everything happening in the Tower is…”

Reid: “Ah, I know it’s becomin’ quite the ruckus, ya know? But, it don’t concern me. If the ones that got in’ll be gettin’ in my way then I’ll slash ’em down, or if they’ll be openin’ my way then I won’t kill ’em at least—— Whoopsie, well, those takin’ part in the Examination gotta be a special case. Though that still ain’t different from pickin’ a fight with me.”

Subaru: “Then…”

Reid: “——Oi, small fry. Don’t’cha say any borin’ shit now.”

Subaru tried to somehow extract information out of Reid by twisting his words. An aberrant fighting spirit emanated from Reid, making him shut his trap.

Subaru: “————”

As if an electric shock, a feeling of oppression which caused physical numbness jolted Subaru—— no, not only Subaru, but all four standing in the aisle. Otherwise, it may have jolted the entire Tower itself.

[222] A reference to a Japanese idiom, “前門の虎、後門の狼” (Tiger at the front gate, wolf at the back gate), standing for a situation in which it is obvious that even if one difficult problem or disaster is solved or avoided, another difficult problem or disaster will be faced, henceforth making it extremely difficult to escape danger.

They had merely brought the displeasure of the lone man. So, was this merely the sense of intimidation he let off?

In Pleiades Watchtower, there were threats aside from this powerful man——

Subaru: “A way to deal with one of the Gluttonies and with that shadow still hasn’t been found either…”

Julius: “——Subaru, regarding that, I bear good news and bad news from my side.”

Towards Subaru murmuring so frailly, Julius, preparing to use his Knight’s sword, spoke. At his commencement, with words as those from some overseas drama, Subaru stiffened his cheeks.

Good news and bad news, though it was an expression common in literary works, hearing those words in reality like this gave a terrible heart-rending feeling.

Gulping down saliva for once, Subaru affirmed the words “good news and bad news” with his mouth,

Subaru: “Then, say the good news first.”

Julius: “Regarding the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony nowhere to be seen whom you are getting anxious about, there is no need to be on the lookout for him. I can assure you regarding that.”

Subaru: “——? I don’t know on what basis you’re saying that, but it’s certainly good news. Then, what’s the bad news?”

Whether he had found a strategy to beat him, or whether he had gotten hands on proof of him having not arrived in the first place or of him having exited the Tower, Subaru raised a single eyebrow in response to what Julius had pointed out.

If there was to be only one Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, then certainly the problems they had to deal with would reduce by one.

If the cards in their hands and the cards in the hands of the opponent were to be seen and compared, Subaru, his body in a horribly bad state, considered what would be the ideal course of action.

Before Subaru, Julius softly exhaled, and continued.

Julius: “The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Roy Alphard, is over there.”

Subaru: “…Ah?”

With an earnest tone, Julius turned the leading edge of his Knight’s sword towards the front.

What stood ahead of the pointing tip of that Knight’s sword, was only a great man with the smile of a ferocious shark.

It could not mean anything else—— A man with the smile of a shark, was standing there.

However, Julius continued his words, as Subaru and the others stood stunned.

Julius: “The one before our eyes, the First Generation Sword Saint, Reid Astrea—— He is, Roy Alphard.”

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Norvak (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 69 – The Absurd Iron Hammer of the Sword

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 5 “An Unreasonable Sword’s Judgment”, Parts 5-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——Gulping down those words he had heard, he required several seconds to chew their implication.

Subaru: “Reid is, Roy Alphard…?”

The report betraying his expectations, Subaru’s thoughts were disturbed in a way quite unlike the suffering he had taken over.

The pain and suffering he had arbitrarily taken from his comrades, due to that negativity, his mind was working slowly, but this was a situation where even that could not be utilized as an excuse.

Taking some time for the moment with his brain seemingly melting out of his ears, he found his thoughts to be endless.

Subaru: “————”

In front of him, boldly stood the majestic figure on whom this revelation had been made, the red-haired swordsman, unmistakably the existence who was the biggest nuisance in Pleiades Watchtower, Reid Astrea. While staring at him, Subaru murmured.

Julius who had readied his Knight’s sword at his side, his expression possessed no signs of falsehood whilst he focused his eyes on Reid.

He was not a person with the personality to make such unfunny jokes at this gambling house where lives were on the line, in the first place. That was the commentary on Julius by Subaru, who had once forgotten everything, therefore, the situation was quite dire.

Because he possessed that conviction, Julius's remarks were certain truth.

Subaru: "If Reid, is Gluttony, then that means…"

Reid was one of the obstacles that existed in the Watchtower, however, his position when it came to demarcation as an ally or enemy was ambiguous.

But if his existence were to explicitly be one of those who were distinctly the enemies, then——

Subaru: "So that's why, you were… again and again, so persistently, after me…?"

Reid: "——Oi, just wait, ya prick. That's a pretty borin' misunderstandin', ya know."

Subaru: "Eh?"

Reid: "It ain't a joke, ya prick. Oi, ya prick. Ya prick. Ya prick, sayin' that I'm takin' the form of that unrelated idiot, don't go 'bout trustin' that borin' conclusion, ya prick."

Hearing Subaru's trembling voice, Reid distorted his cheeks with seemingly painful displeasure.

Subaru was unable to comprehend the meaning of that reaction.

——The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Roy Alphard, was manifesting in the form of Reid.

Subaru, who had just previously seen the transformations of Louis Arneb, had reached that extremely proper conclusion. The Authority of Gluttony, which extorted the shape, form and combat power of the opponent, its result was the Reid before them.

However, Reid's mood turned undeniably worse at that conclusion.

The cause of that seemed to be, rather than the behavior of a coward hiding his true identity without knowing when to give, something much simpler like the displeasure of a child upon being teased.

The real meaning of that was——

Reid: "Ain't it obvious that I'd be me. Because that'll never change, I'm standin' here. Do ya disagree? Ya prick, ya sayin' I'm wrong?"

Subaru: “————”

Touching the eyepatch on his left eye while baring his sharp fangs, Reid declared so towards Subaru.

Faced with that, Subaru inhaled and furrowed his eyebrows, reading deeply into his words.

And, noticing a certain possibility, he took a short breath.

Subaru: “It can’t be, Julius…”

Julius: “Ah, likely, what you are imagining is correct.”

While maintaining his line of sight on Reid, Julius lowered his head straight upon Subaru’s hoarse voice. The good-looking man rubbed his cheek stained by his own blood with his shoulder, and, while still erasing that bloodstain,

Julius: “My wording from earlier was off. Let me correct it—— The flesh body right before us, belongs to Roy Alphard. However, the mind there-in is different.”

Subaru: “——Mind.”

Julius: “Roy Alphard ate the Memories of Reid Astrea, and had the control over his own mind stolen by those Memories. Henceforth freed of all restrictions, he descended from the Second Floor, now making his presence here.”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru found himself dumbfounded in response to Julius affirming the absurd possibility he had conceived.

Subaru wondered how something like that was even possible—— no, each and every one aside from Subaru, Emilia, Beatrice, and even Ram, all of them widened their eyes together.

Certainly, everything in Julius’s explanation was logical.

Originally, as an Examiner of Pleiades Watchtower's Examination, Reid Astrea was not supposed to be able to leave the Second Floor, but he had started wandering about in the Tower, making an expression as if he owned the whole place.

In the worlds Subaru had been made to witness repeatedly, amidst the bedlam which brought the end of the Tower, he himself had not been able to attain freedom, rather, he had taken advantage of Gluttony's actions and acquired freedom.

Indeed, that was it. With that, all the baffling situations surrounding Reid made sense.

——However, he was unable to shut his hanging jaw, for this exceeded norms far too much.

Beatrice: "Got dragged along by the Memories and lost sight of his true self, that'd be what it means, I suppose."

Ram: "Simply put, it must mean that the one with the stronger ego won and remained—— In terms of self-principles, one chased away the other."

Though a bit late compared to Subaru, Beatrice and Ram arrived at the same conclusion.

An unstructured way of speaking, but Ram's words expressed the truth with frankness.

Subaru: "But, I have a doubt too…"

That was why the eaten Reid's existence had not disappeared from everyone's memories.

Till now, the ones who had fallen victim to Gluttony aside from Subaru, Rem and Julius, had their existences erased from the memories of all people, was how it seemed.

Truth was, in the previous loop, the existence of Emilia disappearing from the memories of Ram and the rest was something Subaru could attest to. If so, then the same thing not happening to Reid would mean,

Julius: "In principle, what Gluttony has eaten is not Reid's Name, but, at most, his Memories. It is not possible to eat both the Name and Memories of a dead person. That is what Roy Alphard asserted."

Subaru: "——Hk! Did you witness the scene of Reid getting eaten!?"

Sensing Subaru's doubt, Julius responded with a single eye open. He answered with a short "Yes", looking at the crumbled wall he himself had passed through,

Julius: "When I went to the Second Floor in accordance with your instructions, you see. Timely enough, that was when Roy Alphard and Reid were having negotiations. Negotiation, to label it as that would be dubious in itself, though."

Subaru: "What's dubious about that?"

Julius: "Because Reid was making no effort for resistance—— Perhaps Gluttony, for some reason, was not to be made subject to the Examination. That is why he, the Examiner, was unable to attack the opponent."

Reid: "Hah! Ya prick, that's 'bout half correct 'n half incorrect."

Upon Julius stating that conjecture, none other than Reid called a halt to it. While crackling his thick neck bones, he had his nails touch the pit of his stomach,

Reid: "Sure, no way they were gonna be participants in the Examination, but if I'd wanted them to do that then they would've, ya know? Tho' if I did that then I wouldn't be here right now, ain't it?"

Julius: "You have attained the opponent's ego. Are you saying that you already were certain that you could do so?"

Reid: "Copyin' someone else 'n focusin' on only the strong parts's somethin' I won't allow. Placin' everythin' yer side's got, 'n gamblin' it all's what's interestin'. Tho', that was somethin' that midget didn't understand."

Regardless of the truth of him having obtained that physical body, whatever may have been the interests of Gluttony, the one affected by that sequence of events, Reid spoke of Roy, who he had confronted, with terrible indifference.

But, fact remained that the reality in front of their eyes was the truth—— The ego of Roy Alphard, had been painted out by the monster known as Reid Astrea.

Reid: “If you wanna eat ‘n taste me then ya gotta have a stomach large enough to fit me in. He didn’t have that. That’s why I bit and tore apart the stomach. That’s all there’s to it.”

Subaru: “That’s all there’s to it, you say…”

Aside from his bearing nausea and the sense of abrasion of his mind and body, Subaru felt his head starting to hurt.

In other words, if what happened in Reid’s body was to be said straightforwardly, then,

Subaru: “Revived… Resurrected from the dead, is that what this is about?”

Julius: “In terms of results, you could say that. Above all, a situation in which it is possible to meddle with the Memories of a dead person, and an existence wielding that very ability happening to come across it for the first, this set-up is a series of events akin to a miracle.”

Subaru: “Miracle…”

A life who was supposed to have vanished four-hundred years ago, to witness the moment of it being resurrected like this, could be said to be the ironic manifestation of a miracle, regardless of Julius’s intent to call it such.

That was not to speak of the fact that ressurrection itself——

Emilia: “——Umm, can I ask one thing?”

Reid: “Han?”

Abruptly, once all of the happenings were arranged into order, the one to raise her voice like that was Emilia.

Ever since the encounter with Reid, Emilia had kept her mouth shut so that the topic of discussion may not get diverted. Seeing the discussion reach a point where it could halt, she turned her amethyst eyes towards Reid. And,

Emilia: “You… Reid has been revived, right? With that you’ve become able to leave that place, that’s something I reaaally congratulate you for.”

Reid: “Ahh, thanks. With this I can teach ya all sorts of stuff at a proper place, smokin’ hottie. Let’s have drinks tonight, ya twat. Aside from that… Ahhh~, oioi, we’ll do stuff as I teach ya.”

Emilia: “——? Are you inviting me to go out with you? But, I’ve only gone to a *dayte* with Puck and Subaru, so, sorry. Also…”

Though it would make for an exchange Subaru would never want to miss out on, jumping on by Emilia’s comment on her date was something Subaru currently had no leisure for.

With Subaru keeping those innermost thoughts for some other occasion, Emilia repositioned his body, which she was carrying on her shoulders,

Emilia: “Even though you’re now free, can’t you stop being in our way? In case you don’t know, we’re reaaally busy right now…”

Reid: “Don’t’cha make me say it, smokin’ hottie. I more or less’ve got a grasp on what’s happenin’ here. After all, the tiny brat that had this body was unusually well-informed, I hate it—— Ahh, I really don’t like it.”

As if throwing up, Reid annoyingly gripped to his guts.

It seemed as though it was not mere resurrection, Reid also had the ability to read the memories of Roy Alphard—— in other words, he apparently even had the power to catch a glimpse of a part of the Authority of Gluttony.

Above all, it seemed as if it were something he aesthetically found strongly, terribly repulsive,

Reid: “He didn’t have a standpoint of his own, that’s why he got himself involved in such stupid shit. He’s an irredeemable kid. Tho’ he ended up disappearin’ ’cause he was doin’ it without knowin’ his position, it’s gotta be a natural reward.”

Subaru: “…Why talk about this place and nothing else? If you’re free then how about you go conquer the world and the vast oceans? I pretty much feel like you’re just delaying the problem, if that’s the case…”

Reid: “Ya prick, don’t’cha ready yerself to run away. A situation like the one ya’re in, where ya’re bein’ carried on the shoulders of a woman, it’s so pathetic it’d be better to die. Do ya wanna be coated with embarrassment?”

Subaru: “————”

Subaru’s venture to avoid battle and having the situation ameliorate ended in failure.

Perhaps, even the rest of Subaru’s group may have failed to understand what he had proposed just now as well. In the end, even if Reid were to gain freedom, he intended to respect his role as the Examiner.

Otherwise, not being particular about his title of the Examiner, he simply would not allow for an opponent, whom he had decided to cross swords with, to escape—— That, was perhaps something like his pride as a warrior. Whatever it was,

Emilia: “——I see. If you won’t move aside, then there’s no choice.”

With a long sigh congested with nuance of it being unfortunate, the reply sufficiently suggested Emilia’s decision to attack Reid.

Emilia: “I’m sorry.”

Those words were directed, not at Reid whom she was confronting, but at Subaru atop her shoulders, and he was a second late for noticing that.

Because after a single second, Subaru’s body had been brought down from Emilia’s shoulders and gently handed over to Beatrice beside them.

——In but an instant, crossing the aisle with the speed as that of a bullet, Emilia slammed an ice sword into Reid.

The atmosphere gave rise to a high-pitched sound, yielding forth frost and a beautiful-yet-cruel blade of ice fluttered through the aisle, enshrouded in the eruption of smoke. In any case, that attack aimed for a fatal wound with no hesitation whatsoever—— once Emilia had decided to act as such, there was no faltering in her then. That was something clearly understood after all of the battles till now.

Emilia: “——Haaa!”

For Subaru, that slash attack was one Subaru could barely follow with his eyes, a strike which was almost like an ambush, yet Reid easily took it with the use of his arm, having pulled it out of the breast pocket of his casual dress, his hand holding the chopsticks.

This was not the first time he was seeing Reid wield chopsticks as his special weapon. However, it was not something which could be gotten used to, even after seeing it on multiple occasions. Abnormalities were abnormalities, there lay no change in that recognition.

Subaru: “Aiyeeeee…! Emilia-chan!”

Beatrice: “S-Subaru! Don’t push yourself, in fact! Stay put, I suppose!”

Subaru shouted at Reid’s abnormal swordsmanship, feeling perturbed about Emilia’s safety. Appealing to Subaru to take care of himself was Beatrice, whom Emilia had suddenly forgone and entrusted his body to.

Being supported by her petite frame while kneeling down onto the aisle, Subaru pushed his eyes open.

Meanwhile, Emilia renewed her armaments which had been smashed, or rather, slashed by the chopsticks, and continued the performance of her swords dance like a fairy within sparkling diamond dust.

Easily brushing that away, Reid laughed with a “Hahaa!” like a shark,

Reid: “Hah! Just as expected, ya got it quickly, smokin’ hottie! But, ya twat, don’t’cha know? Yer Examination’s already over, ya know?”

Emilia: “If that’s so! Then pass everyone else too!”

Reid: “Oioi, the hell kinda reasonin’ makes ya say that, aye? I ain’t got any reason to be doin’ that.”

Emilia: “I request you!”

Reid: “There ain’t anythin’ cute in beggin’ like that. For now, take off yer clothes, ya twat.”

Though she had been making a serious expression, Emilia’s entreaty fell on Reid’s deaf ears.

Identically to how he had done so to the first strike, Reid brushed aside, parried away the subsequent strikes using vivid techniques of chopsticks, barely conceivable. Subaru was unable to close his mouth hanging open, before that abnormal swordsmanship.

Of course, Reid's irrefutable mastery was not something unknown to him.

However, even Emilia, who had not drawn a step back evewn against enemies of the likes of Gluttony and the titanic scorpion, had shown overwhelming capacity when compared to such a variety of warriors. At the very least, even a hundred of Subaru would not be able to oppose Emilia—— For Reid, that was, quite literally, a child's play.

Emilia's offense and defense, in which she put doggedness for death, was naught but the play of an unskilled child for Reid.

Subsequently, Emilia, after a mere few exchanges, would be defeated, pierced by those chopsticks. The difference in their ability was so immense that even untrained eyes could identify that. However——

Ram: "——The reason to abstain from using full force? That should be quite simple."

Reid: "Haaan?"

Ram: "Because, you will face an unsightly defeat here at the hands of Ram and the others."

Her petite frame Interrupting the battlefield, so Ram pronounced, positioned behind Reid.

——And caught hold of that back of Reid's.

That alone was more than worthy of admiring, but that was not the end of Ram's fearsomeness.

Emilia attacked without any relent against the opponent, Reid Astrea. Ram had matched her timing with Emilia, who left her battle style upon her senses, with godly intuition.

Precisely this which Subaru had not been able to read at all, was Emilia's initial surprise attack—— movements that suggested the question whether he had really managed to read them, and truth was that they were movements which gave the impression of possibly already having gotten read.

Reid: "————"

The very next instant, Ram's unleashed fist stabbed into the side of Reid's casual dress.

At the moment of impact, with the sound of the flesh and bones creaking, Ram's white fist's piercing strength penetrated through Reid's internal organs; at the soles of Reid's *zori*, the aisle was split open, the man still standing his ground.

Subaru: "It reached through… Hk!?"

Looking at that, Subaru thoughtlessly hugged Beatrice tightly.

He wanted to cheer, but he was unable to voice anything further. Instead of that, he felt his body heat up as if his blood was boiling. Because that was, as far as Subaru knew, the first time Reid had taken damage without it even being a matter of super luck.

Ram: "Ha, AHHHHH——!"

Powerful fists, that could not be imagined as being fired from her slender arms, were hammered into Reid as if a storm. Reid received that with his unguarded lower body, and retreated.

It was not as if he lacked any defense. He merely could not direct defenses there, even for blocking Ram's attacks, as his two chopsticks were being used to block Emilia's fierce attack.

Henceforth, pressured by the might of her tremendous fisting, Reid's body was pushed far to the back.

And while his figure was being blown away, Emilia threw the twin swords she had created with both of her hands, the swords' slashes drawing an arc which was then dispelled by blows from Reid's chopsticks; subsequently, he collapsed onto the aisle, lying spread-eagled.

Subaru: "Did they, do it…?"

Seeing the form of Reid collapsed, lying flat on the aisle, Subaru lightly whispered in astonishment with widened eyes.

Blocking Emilia's surprise attack had been a final desperate tactic of his. The rest, Ram's attacks, was what he had gotten a taste of. Each and every blow had wielded enough power to make his bones creak.

Emilia's strenuous fighting was a matter of course, but perhaps misjudging Ram's combat power had been the cause of Reid's defeat.

As an effect of Cor Leonis, having been able to move without any hindrances, Ram's ability had been enough to reap the consciousness out of her opponent Reid before he could get serious——

Subaru: "——Hk! Right now, you can quickly tie him down and render him unable to battle! Emilia-chan! Constrict him with ice…"

For a moment his thoughts had come to a halt, unsure of their victory, but he was unable to overlook that extremely valuable situation. Panicking, Subaru instructed Emilia to restrain Reid.

At the same pace, he tried to call out to Ram, who had been making strenuous efforts——

Beatrice: "…Subaru, when, did your health come back?"

Subaru: "Eh?"

Suddenly, Beatrice asked so, who had been supporting his body.

Receiving that doubt, Subaru tardily came to notice the fact that he was standing on his legs, giving instructions to Emilia—— The agony which had been eating into him as if a curse, had disappeared.

Ram: "——Kah, fuh."

The moment immediately after he judged its significance, Ram's body shivered, trembling violently.

Ram's upper body, her back turned towards the side he was at, jolted and she collapsed to her knees, unable to support her body.

Subaru: "Ram!!"

Julius: "Kukh!"

Unable to even stretch out her hand, Ram collapsed much like a puppet whose threads had been severed. The one to jump at Ram's collapsing body was Julius, who had been awaiting for a gap for him to plunge into the fray.

Supporting Ram's wholly exhausted body, Julius confirmed her condition, his expression freezing over. The reason for that was Ram's complexion, and the vermilion of thick blood which dyed her clothes.

Copious amounts of blood were flowing from the wound in Ram's abdomen, its bleeding previously staunched by herself. Though it was true that the lost blood brought serious danger to her life, that alone was not the issue.

The greatest problem was linked with the betterment of Subaru's condition. In other words——

Subaru: "The effect of Cor Leonis, has been cut off…"

???: "——Ahhh~, so it finally got cut, aye. Ya prick, don't'cha be doin' borin' shit. Aren't'cha just hidin' behind a woman. Ya're a disgrace of a small fry, ya prick."

Subaru: "————"

In front of Subaru, who had been rendered speechless, the collapsed Reid swung and stationed both of his feet, standing up with vigor. Reid took light pats at his hips, swept his back, then swung his arms in circles from his shoulders whilst gripping onto the chopsticks.

His attitude which felt as if he had not taken any of the damage Ram had inflicted on him, though that alone made his body shudder, what made Subaru uneasy were his words immediately afterwards.

——Reid had said, that it got cut. Just, what on earth was he referring to?

Reid: "Playin' 'round like that'll always be borin'. First of all, somethin' like feelin' no pain or ache even when yer guts're all torn up, are ya makin' fun of me with that, ya prick."

Subaru: "Uh, ah…"

Reid: "If ya say ya wanna do it with perfection, then ya gotta stand what ya receive too. But, this one's done for. Ya prick, this one's done for, ya know. Ya prick, can't'cha see? This woman was gonna die even before it got cut."

Intimidated by Reid's low-pitched words, Subaru turned his line of sight towards Ram, who was in Julius's arms. Receiving that gaze, Julius lowered his chin slightly.

Julius: “His words are correct. Miss Ram’s wounds are no trivial matter. Even now, she is on the verge of death.”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

Julius: “The reason why the bleeding is not stopping, is perhaps because of the usage of a chemical which hinders the clotting of blood. Aside from that, present on her body must be the recoil of her pushing herself.”

Each and every word of Julius’s analysis attempted to carve a painful fissure onto Subaru’s chest.

He, had failed—— Subaru’s Cor Leonis overlapped with his complacent failure.

Subaru: “————”

Taking over Ram’s inferior physical form, he had created a circumstance under which she could fight.

Though that was not a mistaken judgement, he had ignored the injuries she had taken—— no, having Ram herself ignore those was what had been a mistake.

If Subaru was to take over the pain and anguish of injuries, she would not be able to be conscious of the wounds’ seriousness. If Ram were to conduct herself in a way suggesting she was unharmed, neither Emilia nor anyone else would come to notice anything.

Julius: “A magic for sharing sensations similar to Nect, something a bit different from that but perhaps entirely unlike. Something quite unlike it, had been put to use. And, you said that you cut it.”

Reid: “I’m good at cuttin’ invisible stuff, ya see. Well, the trick’s intuition. Took me quite a bit of time for that. Took a pretty grand hit.”

Reid exaggerated the reason he had bathed in Ram’s storm-like fists. However, returning to the original topic, the truth was that he could more or less not feel any of the damage he had taken.

The trick behind that too, was pronounced from Julius’s mouth. Whilst keeping Ram in his embrace, Julius gently turned his gaze backwards—— towards the aisle which had been fissured by the close combat.

Julius: “You had all of Miss Ram’s attacks escape onto the floor with the bottom of your feet, was it.”

Reid: “It’s a technique a woman friend of mine, Trisha, used to be good at, ya see.”

Reid laughed with a “Kaka”, as he firmly stomped his *zori* on the aisle.

Hearing the conversation of the two, Subaru, while continuing to shiver, glanced at the crevices of the aisle. The endless wounds born onto the aisle were proof of Reid having directed Ram’s attacks onto the corridor.

It was perhaps some technique to direct the impact of blows towards someplace else—— It could be said to be the culmination of martial arts.

Subaru: “…Ah.”

And in fact, when Ram’s initial blow had stabbed into him, Subaru too had witnessed the aisle tremendously fissure with his own eyes. Same applied to all subsequent consecutive strikes.

Both this and that, everything was——

Subaru: “Severing the connection between me and Ram…? In the first place, how did that even…”

Reid: “I just told’cha. I slash down what I wanna slash down, live where I wanna live, and sleep with women I wanna sleep with—— I slashed down that borin’ game, all while hummin’.”

So did Reid declare without a care.

Cutting things which could not be seen. Alternatively, cutting connections which did not exist materially. Was the capability of doing so, the true ability of the existence named the Sword Saint?

Emilia: “But, when I struck you from above with a lot of strength, you were in pain…!”

Reid: “Back then the situation was different, ya know, smokin’ hottie. Right now, I’m here to enjoy the fightin’ more than during the Examination. If it’s a fight then ya gotta be more serious than in the Examination, ya know. Do ya disagree, ya twat?”

Slashing and repelling away Emilia's response, Reid snorted his nose and prepared his chopsticks. Adjusting the stance of his chopsticks as if he were commencing a meal as one usually would, and pointing their ends towards Julius, Reid's blue eyes gleamed with a blaze.

Reid: "That's how it is. Ya got what I'm sayin', aye, ya prick? Ya prick. Hey ya prick."

Julius: "——To settle this, with the sword. That is your intention, correct?"

Reid: "Yeah, that's right. Lemme tell ya, I'll allow any damn thing aside from swords too, ya know? Whether ya wanna throw magic at me or clash with me, it ain't a problem. If you wanna win against me…"

Quite boldly, Reid gestured with a finger touching his chest, and pointed towards his heart.

In other words, that was the only way to bring an end to his life, that was what his expression indicated.

That was to say, that it was evidence that the fixture Subaru had designated had been correct——

Julius: "Why, must you obsess over myself?"

Reid: "Ahhh? I'm obsessed over ya? Gimme a break. Bastards of just mere words with nice faces're the race I hate the most, ain't that so. On top of that, why'd I gotta be obsessed?"

Julius: "Then…"

Reid: "——Ya're the one who'd have a reason to obsess over me. If I draw back from here, do ya really think that'd be fine?"

Julius: "————"

Reid's response to Julius's question could not be described as one that was clear.

He himself, belonged to a race of those types who did not see worth in conveying all things as words. Furthermore, a large part of his response had been occupied by something similar to sensation, it was difficult to comprehend.

However, understanding the answer was a group limited to——

Reid: "——Tch, a troublesome one ended up comin' here."

Before that answer could be digested, what preceded was Reid clicking his tongue in discontent.

And, the cause behind the click of his tongue, revealed its figure from the interior of the aisle Subaru and the others had come from—— no, it pounced upon them, in the form of a corona.

Emilia: "Subaru!"

Immediately before the white luster could evaporate Subaru, Emilia's ice sword separated and distanced the two away from each other. As a note of shattering of ice echoed, the repelled light zipped through the aisle—— An extremely long tail stinger, disappeared as if having become frayed.

That was namely, the baptism by the guardian of the Sage's Tower——

Subaru: "——Shaula."

Shaula: "————"

Red compound eyes emerged from the depths of the hall, possessing multiple legs, the titanic scorpion revealed its form. Jet-black shell and fiendishly large pincers, its figure was both ominous and healthy.

However, the form of Ley, who had been left behind to battle that titanic scorpion, was nowhere around it. Although the titanic scorpion had no traces of blood on itself, had he faced defeat at the hands of the titanic scorpion and been left behind, then it was all good, but,

Subaru: "Reid and Shaula, at the same time…"

Beatrice: "S-Subaru…"

Caught between two formidable enemies, in the midst of the situation where they could not take any inadvertent action, Beatrice called out to Subaru with a trembling voice.

Looking back towards that Beatrice, he noticed her pale expression. Beatrice's expression was painted with horror, wrenching his heart.

Somehow or the other, Subaru searched for words in an attempt to clear away the unrest in her heart,

Subaru: “Beatrice, it’s alright. At any rate, we haven’t managed to find a plan yet, but it’s alright. Recovery is still…”

Beatrice: “That’s not it, I suppose, that’s not it, in fact! ——It’s coming, I suppose!”

Subaru: “It’s coming?”

As he heard Beatrice’s objection, who had widened her eyes, her expression altered, he glanced at the titanic scorpion once again.

Reid was here, and Shaula was on the other side, this was the very meaning of threat. In a situation where such terrifying beings had gathered, what was going to come now——

Subaru: “——It can’t be.”

Reid: “I just told’cha, didn’t I. That a troublesome one ended up comin’ here.”

As if affirming the thought which had passed by Subaru’s mind, Reid so asserted.

That tone of speaking was serious, as if it were having trouble digesting this situation.

——The subsequent instant, an impact reached their feet in the form of a parlous earthquake, jolting Pleiades Watchtower.

???: “————”

Without exaggeration, when Subaru felt the impact reach his body, for him, heaven and earth were overturned.

Subaru was blown off without even the use of a technique—— Within Subaru’s field of vision, the residents of the fantasy world were each displaying astonishing movements.

Midair, Emilia kicked the foothold she had created with ice and repelled the needles fired by the titanic scorpion’s stinger consecutively, seemingly advancing towards her comrades—— no, towards Subaru.

In the world which was tilting diagonally, Julius seemingly dashed atop a wall and closed in on Reid, commencing a melee with a thrust of his Knight’s sword again the elite swordsman.

And, Beatrice jumped towards Subaru, who had tightly held onto Ram and kept her close to himself,

Beatrice: “——Murak!”

The moment she chanted that, Subaru felt himself be enveloped by a feeling of suspension different from that wrought by the impact. Released from the yokes of gravity, the feeling was as if he had been thrown into a world without gravity.

The effect was not as little as simply having the flipping of heaven and earth restored for him.

Each one, was acting at their very respective best with whatever they could muster——

Subaru: “——Ah.”

As if sneering at those very best of actions, multitudinous volumes of the jet-black shadow swallowed the Tower in its entirety.

???: “————”

Dreadful pressure echoed, and the Watchtower, which boasted strength enough to make it difficult to believe that it was mere stone, was crushed wholly. That was the tyranny of the shadow, which was not originally supposed to possess mass.

The arrival of the impact, which could no longer be named as a single destructive happening but rather something closer to a natural disaster, easily swallowed, digested even those who possessed abilities extraordinary enough to be called superhumans even in this world.

Going up against the titanic scorpion, making free use of magic and her physical abilities and putting up a brave fight, Emilia, as well.

Swinging the Knight’s sword, and charging towards the legend entertained by his self, Julius, as well.

Protecting Subaru, and using magic with her small body, Beatrice, as well.

In the juncture where they twinkled aglow, the stretching shadow entwined, and they turned invisible.

Subaru: “————”

Without sound, without reverberation, the forms of Emilia and the others vanished.

What name should be given to what had occurred to their bodies in the matter of an instant? Subaru was unable to find any pertinent words within himself.

Merely, there existed something he could say without doubt.

Subaru: "——I have failed."

???: "——I love you."

At the same time he accepted reality, he was whispered words of dusky love.

Whilst being whispered into his ears, or otherwise, whilst kissing him, or otherwise, whilst embracing his entire body, or otherwise, whilst caressing his soul, frighteningly direct were those words with the soul of love.

He immediately understood. The greatest problem amongst the five obstacles.

The shadow which swallowed everything had arrived; whether it was possible to deal with it at all, even that notion alone was questionable.

Subaru: "————"

This was his third time seeing that shadow, and each time he encountered it, Subaru's life had been lost.

This time was no exception, now that the shadow had arrived, made its entrance——

Reid: "——Ya prick, the hell're ya doin' thinkin' 'bout sleepin', oi."

At that moment, the jet-black shadow which enveloped Subaru, was mowed down by a flash that had been swung.

Subaru: "——You've got to be joking."

Reid: "Widen yer eyes 'n see. What's the joke, ya prick. Ya prick, are yer eyes open? Open yer eyes 'n take a good look, ya prick. What's the joke 'bout me?"

Saying that whilst casually swinging a Knight's sword, and having slashed away the shadow, was Reid. He wielded in his hands, not chopsticks, but a Knight's sword—— which belonged to Julius, and exhaled through his nose.

It was truly ironic that the sword which had lost its owner was displaying more ability in the hands of the Sword Saint than in those of its owner, but there was no time present to be having such thoughts.

Because Subaru, who had been standing upright, had his torso kicked by Reid's *zori*.

Subaru: "Guh, eh."

Inside the narrow aisle, his suspended body was unable to hit even the ceiling or the walls.

The structure of the Watchtower had already been destroyed, and he was no longer able to determine where the ceiling was or where the walls were. What was present in Subaru's environs was an endlessly black sky, an endlessly black floor, an endlessly black world.

Anything and everything, became incomprehensible—— No, within his arms, there was warmth moving minutely.

Ram: "——Uh."

The warm body of the unconscious, fainted Ram asserted her existence.

Subaru: "——Hk."

Directing strength in his molars, biting and tearing into his own lips, he directed life into himself.

At this moment, when anything and everything was being painted black, by giving up on comprehending the situation, was Subaru not simply entrusting his body to the end?

In front of this life trying its best to survive at this moment, that was unforgivable.

Subaru: "——Still, something."

Though the situation was in this state, there yet must be something he could attain.

Till now, Subaru had been swallowed by this jet-black evil influence and had lost his life twice. However, those two occasions had been abrupt, and he must have had no time left to do this.

What he had attained now, was because Ram was asserting her fragile life and because——

Reid: "——Haaan."

Of the kick he had received from Reid, who was within the shadow much like Subaru, wearing a ferocious smile.

Of course, he was not grateful for that.

It hurt as if the pit of his stomach had been gouged out, and in the first place, the reason why they had not had enough time before the shadow swallowed the Watchtower was because of Reid's unnecessary interruption. Hence why——

Subaru: "You'll be crushed, as well—— By the Finest of Knights I know of."

Reid: "Ya prick there, keep actin' cool just like ya're 'til the very end, small fry."

Looking downward, Reid set his aim on Subaru with a backhand grip on the Knight's sword. There was distance between them, but from Reid's perspective, a distance of a few meters might as well be nonexistent.

And, below Reid, who had established Subaru as his enemy, the vivacious jet-black shadow yet continued advancing closer. Something like that was not even deemed to be anything by Reid's fighting spirit.

Though he was unaware of it, at this moment, Subaru may just be witnessing it.

A long time ago, said to have happened four-hundred years ago, one act of the legend of the Witch and the Sword Saint.

However, something like that was meager as the absurd destruction and violence that was to be called death which drew close to Subaru——

Subaru: "At least…"

Even if just a second longer, I want you to stay alive.

Enshrouded by that wish, Subaru tightly embraced Ram's body, in his arms.

The next moment, a torrent of light, unbelievably stemming from a sword, swallowed Subaru——

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——Each time he vanished, each time he would redo, each time he made a wish, he was faced with vicissitude.

Countless times, repeating, repeating, he continued to pile up ends which were supposed to happen only once.

Suddenly, he thought.

That he always had someone by his side in the moments of end, may be something to feel happy for.

Should never being alone in the moments of end, grant him the strength to stand.

However, alongside, he also thought of this.

About why, always, Natsuki Subaru was unable to rescue that someone whom he nestled close to, in the moments of end.

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???: "————"

Clouds of sand were rising up to extremely high skies which they were never supposed to reach.

Pleiades Watchtower's balcony, several meters above the ground, underneath which were present the advancing hordes of Witchbeasts, commencing with their assault to bring down the Watchtower.

Holding them back, with her own ability to control Witchbeasts was Meili, making strenuous efforts.

Julius was above, heading for Reid on the Second Floor.

And, Subaru and the others must make haste and dash to Emilia and Ram, who must be clashing with Ley Batenkaitos——

???: “Master? Are you alright?”

In accordance with Subaru’s summons, she tilted her neck, with her long, black braid swaying about.

As she pronounced that question, in her expression, in her eyes, sentiments such as those of impatience or irritation could not be felt. Of course, no light of cunningness planning to deceive them could be perceived either.

Whether that was her camouflage or her true intents, there was no definite answer to that, however——

???: “Master, are you listening? People aside me and Master seem to have gotten involved in troublesome stuff but… Is there something I can do for you, Master?”

Subaru: “Yeah, that’s right… Something you can do for me, huh.”

???: “Yup. If it’s Master’s request, then I can energetically *tobu*[223] into fire, into water, even into large explosions!”

Energetically, possessing no malice, that person, Shaula said so whilst stretching her arms wide.

Staring at that carefree smile, Subaru turned back and inhaled.

He had made his return. To this moment, he had been made to return.

There were no changes in what he was supposed to do. There existed people he must save, people he must defeat.

Therefore, without losing his way, in order to settle what all he was supposed to do, Subaru undertook a necessary ceremony. That was——

[223] Engrish flip. Means “fly/rush” (飛ぶ), originally “フライアウェーイ” (fly away).

Subaru: “Shaula, will you listen to anything I tell you to do?”

Shaula: “Of course, duh! If it’s Master’s request then I’ll listen to anything! If it’s Master’s demand then I’ll even listen to something which may be a bit extreme. Ah, ah, ah, could it be Master finally reached his limit in holding back in front of my *dowokoshita erotai*[224]? That’s why you kept all others away, and it’s just the two of us now? Ah, you you you! Geez, Master——”

Subaru: “——Shaula.”

Wriggling with her cheeks sandwiched in her hands, Shaula blushed at Subaru’s words.

However, Subaru did not pay heed to such words of hers, and stared at her face with a serious face. And——

Subaru: “——If I tell you to die, will you die?”

[224] Engrish flip. Means “hyper-sexy body” (度を越したエロ体), originally “ダイナマイツバディ” (dynamite body). Hey, I tried.

Arc 6 Chapter 70 - The Earnest Star

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 24, Chapter 6 “A Single-Minded Star”

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translation (Ringo) — Complete

——Within the collapsing Tower, basking in Reid’s decapitating slash, Natsuki Subaru’s life had been scorched away.

Quite literally, scorching away had accurately been his moment of death.

There were various things which he was pained by and which he needed to confirm, such as the way to cope with the shadow mass drawing near, or what he intended to do afterwards, and, above all, finding a foothold within the crumbling Tower some way or the other; yet all those of his efforts had been abandoned.

What alone was confirmed was that Reid’s final flash had swallowed Subaru, and vaporized him.

That it had perhaps not hurt, was what he thought.

Of course, he did not believe it had been Reid’s benevolence at all, but pain and fear not accompanying the moment of Death was an unexpected occurrence for Subaru, who had died several times within a short frame of time.

Indeed, neither had he felt pain nor fear—— Merely rage, was what he held.

Subaru: “——I will…”

For just how many times would he continue to pile up meaningless deaths?

Things he had taken with him, hints that would break him out of the deadlock, as long as those were present, Subaru's deaths would not be meaningless, and the deaths he was continuing to pile up would not be put to waste.

That was, a terrible deceit.

That was, merely an excuse to turn his eyes away from his own powerlessness.

He had died meaninglessly, powerlessly, without will, without heart, aimlessly, and he did not want to think that that was all there was to it. That is why, for not having merely died, he desired meaning in his death.

If only he could have had been stronger.

If only, he could have had been wiser.

If only, instead of his current self, he could have had been stronger, wiser, bolder.

Subaru: "But…"

The only one here was merely the weak, stupid, pathetic Natsuki Subaru.

Because nobody, ever, tried to leave that Subaru alone.

That was, what was supporting his current self's wound-filled resolution.

Subaru: "For that reason, I——"

For that reason, Natsuki Subaru——

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Subaru: "——If I tell you to die, will you die?"

The moment he declared that, it was not as if he felt no hesitation.

That was because he was unable to know what kind of reaction to expect his opponent to give him the moment she received that question—— No, he knew what to expect.

Having imagined various patterns, he had thought of what it eventually would be.

If so, then in regards to the faltering he had embraced while declaring that question, for what reason did he possess that indecision?

At any rate——

Shaula: "——? If Master tells me to die then I'll die, you know?"

He felt his chest ache upon Shaula's indifferent response, who had a finger touching her cheek.

As if he were being stabbed, to the point it would form cracks; painfully, he let out a shriek within the core of his chest.

Subaru: "————"

Oozily, upon the painful optical illusion, Subaru gripped the pit of his stomach and deeply exhaled.

Though he himself had voiced out those wounding words just now, he thought himself comical for feeling hurt. Looking at Subaru's state, Shaula rounded her eyes in curiosity.

Devoid of ill intent, Shaula's attitude seemed as if she had been asked about the menu for today's evening meal, and merely responded appropriately.

That reaction of hers was the second worst in the patterns he had predicted.

With no pretense, Shaula was selecting the option of accepting the instruction for her to abandon her life.

That was no lie or humor, that was her real intention with no second thoughts. He was able to understand that by a single glance into her straightforward eyes.

Subsequently having caught a glimpse into her dark self-interests or plans would have possibly saved Subaru's heart.

However, the reality was that Subaru had not prepared for such an escape route. Whether that was compassion or mercilessness, at this stage he would not be able to even differentiate between the two, but——

Subaru: "…Is that, so."

Shaula: "Master, do you want me to die? Hmm, if it's Master's request then I'll listen to anything, and I'm perfectly fine with it personally, but again, isn't it quite a weird timing for such a thought? Right now, it's a total fiasco inside the Tower…"

Subaru: "I know. I know."

Hearing Subaru's husky reply, Shaula tilted her neck while having her finger remain on her cheek. Going along with that movement of her neck, her long braid—— her scorpiontail, swayed about.

Scorpiontail. If considered, that was quite an ironic naming as well.

Similar to Shaula, a term meaning Scorpius, her name was expressed even upon her body. That was made apparent not merely through her name, but through various other aspects of hers as well.

That was surely because she had no intentions of concealing it. Hence why——

Subaru: "——Shaula, aren't… you capable of taking the form of a large scorpion?"

Lacking any sluggish phraseology, Subaru threw a straight ball regarding his opponent's secret.

The five obstacles that would attack Pleiades Watchtower—— one of those, was the existence of the jet-black titanic scorpion. Subaru had been halfway convinced that it had been Shaula.

However, for Subaru, that answer he had sensed was merely his interpretation of the feeling he got from the powerful Authority of unidentified nature, Cor Leonis.

If he were to try and gain confirmation for that answer he had sensed, enquiring the opponent directly would be the fastest option.

Of course, if he had time to, then he might have chosen a different option as well, and if he had been unable to trust his opponent's response, then he might have been obligated to employ a different method.

However, Shaula kept her neck tilted at that inquiry of Subaru's,

Shaula: "«Take the form of», the nuance is a bit different from that, but yup, I can~. Ah, but, it damages my *utsukushii teisai*[225] so I don't really like it too much. I just think that the design given to me by Mother and Master's the best."

In spite of the question being one lacking any chain of logic, Shaula readily answered with no hesitation yet again.

Subaru: "————"

She possessed no intentions of hiding anything.

And the nature of Shaula herself, it could be said that it had been established with this proof. At the same time, the titanic scorpion which had made its appearance in the Tower—— its true identity was her, he had now gained that confirmation.

That was exactly the reason why, at the time Cor Leonis's effect had perceived the positions of his comrades within the Tower, its mechanism had caused the titanic scorpion to be indicated in that perception.

Shaula: "Master? Are you okay? Your face has a pretty bad color, you know? Would you like to *hareru*[226] yourself with a lap pillow, an arm pillow, a chest pillow, me as a body pillow, or something like that?"

Subaru: "…Don't say things which dampen my spirits. First of all, we don't have such time, you yourself said that, didn't you?"

[225] Engrish flip. Means "beautiful appearance" (美しい体裁), originally "プリティ" (pretty).

[226] Engrish flip. Means "to refresh (spirits)" (晴れる), originally "リフレッシュ" (to refresh).

Shaula: “It’s true that it’s a fiasco inside the Tower, but for me, Master’s on the top of the priority list, everything else can be kept for later. That’s why, if Master slips into confusion and says he wants to get in a floor wrestling match with me, I’d welcome it with super-open arms. I’m getting fired up.”

Subaru: “Don’t get fired up. Get some water.”

Shaula: “Just as always, geez Master~.”

Sharpening her lips, Shaula made a pouting face.

If his back and forth with her, along with her expression, were to be taken into consideration alone, it could be misunderstood that the situation that had cropped up around Subaru and the others was seemingly one of peace.

Subaru: “————”

However, reality was not kind to Subaru and the others at all. It was the farthest thing from peace.

Whilst Subaru and Shaula leisurely conversed like this, Emilia and Ram were making efforts to hold off Gluttony, and Beatrice had joined them for support. Julius was colliding with Roid[227] on the Second Floor, Echidna had grouped with Patrasche, and was likely evacuating to Taygeta along with Rem. And finally, Meili was holding off the hordes of Witchbeasts—— this was very best they could do against the five obstacles.

However, even that was merely deceit for the sake of conversing with Shaula.

Because, with these as surroundings, Natsuki Subaru——

Shaula: “M-Master? Are you seriously alright? If you stare at me with such imposing eyes, I won’t be able to hold back this four-hundred year old wait I have experienced, you know…?”

At Subaru’s gaze staring at her self, Shaula hugged her slender figure with her arms. It seemed to be the usual feign, but that was not it.

[227] The expression used in the Japanese here is quite literally “Reid=Roy” (レイド＝ロイ), which is kinda ugly so we’ll go with the famous fanname for this unholy amalgamation, Roid. It’s a lot more stiffy.

She truly was in a situation where she was feeling unease because of Subaru's attitude. It was unlike her—— no, that was wrong. Perhaps these were her true feelings.

She had not felt shaken even when Subaru had told her to die, but when Subaru acted abnormally, her fragile heart had been rocked, almost astonishingly—— Akin to, a baby bird innocently yearning for its parents.

Subaru: "————"

At the time he had fired his first question at Shaula, Subaru held several possibilities within him.

Amongst those, the worst one was that the instant she would get struck by those heartless words from Subaru, Shaula would murder him impulsively just like that—— That was the case in which her attitude until now had been mere acting, and anything and everything had been fabricated.

It was not impossible.

Though he had possessed no confirmation before that question, she had a track record of having changed into the form of the titanic scorpion, then murdering Subaru, Echidna and Beatrice. Or perhaps, in the tragedy where Subaru had been unable to find a single person alive in his surroundings, it was highly possible that she'd had a hand in that after turning into the titanic scorpion.

That was why, the first question had been a gamble for Subaru as well.

Once he said that, the instant immediately afterwards Shaula had digested that question, it would not have been strange if Subaru's head had been evaporated, that was the sort of gamble it had been—— he could now say that he had won that gamble.

However, gambles never ended at just one.

The debt Subaru had unconsciously piled up, the stakes prepared by Gluttony and the Pleiades Watchtower, in order to regain whatever he had lost until now, piling up such little victories would be far too lacking.

For a huge victory, it was a necessity to make a huge gamble. Henceforth——

Subaru: “Shaula, sorry for having so many questions, but I want to ask something. From what I’ve heard, there are supposed to be some rules for the Examinations of Pleiades Watchtower, is that so?”

Shaula: “You ask that now at this timing when I’m getting all hot…!? Well, yes, there are? I’d talked about it before Master crashed his head into the urinal too, though…”

Subaru: “Tell me, about them.”

Without hiding her sulking attitude, Shaula gently positioned her fingers opposite to her chest. And, she immediately swayed about her positioned fingers, whispering “Umm~”.

Shaula: “First, it is forbidden to leave without completing the Examinations. Second, it is forbidden to violate the rules of the Examinations. Third, it’s forbidden to disrespect the Libraries. Fourth, it’s forbidden to do anything which causes destruction to the Tower itself—— Yeah.”

Whilst keeping her fingers folded, Shaula explained with an awfully fluent tone.

Of course, she was a girl proficient in speaking if she were to limit her thoughtless comments, and nothing felt odd in her explanation, which was lacking any pauses. Though nothing felt odd, there was a catch to it.

That went for the serious tone of her voice which was unlike her, at but the end of her gesture of counting with fingers, she had touched her final finger and then stopped there.

Subaru: “——The fifth one?”

Shaula: “…It doesn’t exist. Master, didn’t you hear me? I must’ve said up to four. Master, can’t you even count numbers now? That won’t do~. Numbers aren’t my strong point either, but even I can count that much…”

Subaru: “Shaula.”

Shaula: “————”

Staring, Subaru raised his voice and took a single step, shortening the distance between him and Shaula.

Those two had been facing each other head-on beforehand, but the distance between them now was enough that one could extend his hand and grasp onto the other one—— Even that action was a gamble for Subaru.

Of course, just because the distance between them was only the breadth of a single arm, just because he had shortened the distance between them to that of only a single arm, the difference in fighting power between him and her was not so small that it would change anything.

Shaula: "Master… Could it be, that you're toying with my heart? Master getting closer to me because he wants to, and not because I want to, Master wants me to open my mouth, that's it, isn't it? And following up on that, with the same energy, hug me and melt me…"

Subaru: "If your mouth really will open by that, then I'll do it. That can even be said to be a side benefit… But, if what you believe is my purpose based on your intuition turns out wrong, then I don't think that'll happen."

Shaula: "————"

Subaru: "Shaula, I'll ask again. What's the fifth rule of the Tower?"

While accepting Shaula's mild refusal, Subaru questioned her for a second time.

That was an action not of inching closer to her physically, but instead of stepping onto her heart. Those repeated words, although perhaps bitter, were something she could not make it seem as if she did not hear them.

Embracing that resolution, in front of Subaru who had clenched his fists, Shaula slightly exhaled, and,

Shaula: "——*Dame*[228]."

Subaru: "…*Dame*?"

Rotating her neck right and left, Shaula crossed her arms in front of her voluptuous chest, making an X.

[228] Engrish flip. Means "no good" (だめ), originally "NG" (Japanese slang for "no good").

「シャウラ、改めて聞くぞ。塔の、五つ目のルールはなんだ？」
「――NGッス」
首を横に振り、シャウラが豊満な自分の胸の前で腕を交差させ、バツ印を作る。
「NGッス、やだ、話したくないッス。五つ目のルール？そんなの、どうでもいいじゃないッスか。あーしとお師様の蜜月には、何の関係も……」

Though her behavior was childish, her eyes were far beyond serious.

Shaula: "————"

Intently staring at Subaru, who was standing at a precarious spot, Shaula's eyes were filled with heavy emotions.

Those quiet, yet boundlessly deep, heavy emotions, which should be named as an appeal, were brittle and ephemeral.

With unwillingness, she once again rotated her neck right and left,

Shaula: "*Dame*. No, I don't wanna talk about it. The fifth rule? Does something like that even matter. In my and Master's honeymoon, it has nothing to…"

Subaru: "As if it has nothing to do. I, along with everyone, am challenging the Examinations of this Tower. I can't be as optimistic as to think it'll all be fine without even knowing the rules of the Examinations. That's why, Shaula."

Shaula: "…I'd rather not."

Subaru: "Shaula!"

Like a disobedient child, Shaula covered her ears and averted her eyes. At that attitude of Shaula's, Subaru spoke bluntly, with a strong tone.

Subaru: "You must have your own duties in this Tower. The Tower's Star-Keeper…? You must've been doing those all this time, right. I don't know if it's true or not, but for four-hundred years, too! Then——"

Shaula: "——It's been, four days."

Subaru: "…Ah?"

The spilled voice, as if a whisper, shortly halted Subaru's thoughts.

The years Subaru was questioning, and that time frame, too short to even be comparable to the former. Surely, that her statements had been lies, and the time Shaula had spent in the Tower had always been short—— something like that was not possible.

While retaining possession of the heavy emotions in her eyes, Shaula, with her lips shivering, continued.

Shaula: “It’s been only four days, since Master’s come to the Tower. Within those, as Master was in bed for two days, that makes it only two days since Master and I have met with each other, spoken to each other, have been side-by-side with each other… Even though I’ve waited for even four-hundred years! It’s been only two days…”

Subaru: “Shaula…”

Shaula: “For just a single moment, I thought that a single glimpse would be fine.”

Covering her eyes, Shaula immediately ceased to have her gaze slumped downwards. Seemingly, as if she were saying she regretted to have Subaru out of her field of vision for even a single moment—— No, upon considering, that was indeed the case.

As far back as Subaru could recall, Shaula had been in the same space, at the same time, as Subaru, always watching Subaru. That was not for a shallow purpose like keeping Subaru under surveillance with minimal effort, but certainly——

Shaula: “For four-hundred years, I waited for Master in the Tower. I thought, I would be satisfied with a single glimpse—— But, that was wrong.”

Subaru: “————”

Shaula: “I mean, Master is my everything, after all. Master’s everything, and all my feelings for Master, are what make me. The four-hundred years it took, I can’t convey them to Master. All of those, in just two days… I can’t, come to terms with that.”

Subaru: “…That’s why, you won’t tell me the fifth rule?”

Acute emotions enveloped the entirety of Shaula’s body, and molded the existence known as her.

Four-hundred years—— the weight of those words, which he had perceived merely through those words' appearance, finally became an actual time frame for Subaru, and he stood at a disposition where he could feel that in concrete fashion.

After all, her attitude in speaking of those four-hundred years, had been too casual.

He had thought that perhaps there existed no instrument in her to embrace feelings such as hardship, sadness.

He had thought that perhaps she was inhuman like that scorpion, down to her very heart, down to her very soul.

Shaula: "I don't want to talk about the rule. *Dame*. After all, if I talk about that…"

Subaru: "————"

Shaula: "If I talk about that, Master will notice the way to clear the Examinations. That's why, if I talk about that, if I end up talking about that… my time with Master will end."

Poignantly, Shaula hugged her body, and expressed her own true feelings to Subaru.

As if vomiting blood—— no, as if restraining herself from crying, that tone of her voice stabbed through Subaru's heart.

It was a reply he had not anticipated.

Just like with his initial question, Subaru had thought of some patterns regarding the answer to this question.

The true motives behind Shaula hiding the rules of Pleiades Watchtower—— if she was colluding with the person who had created the rules of this nasty Tower, she had certain plans as well, was what he had thought.

Otherwise, unrelated to such dark plans, the reason why she had not spoken about the rules was on a simple whim or had slipped out of her mind, and that may not hold any significance, he had thought that as well.

But, neither was the truth.

Shaula did have a reason as to why she did not want to speak of the Tower's rules. And that reason, was unrelated to the ideas of the Sage or whoever who had created the Tower, but rather, an earnest wish.

——Four-hundred years, having lived that time in solitude, Shaula had continuously awaited her reunion with the person she was waiting for.

That had come true, she had gained happiness, and that was why, she wished for that time to last longer, even if slightly.

If it had been for the sake of fulfilling that modest desire——

Shaula: "Master, will you hate me, who lied to you?"

Subaru: "————"

Shaula: "Hating me, not even wanting to see my face… will you be like that?"

For what reason, was she making a face much more pained than when told something like "Will you die"?

For what reason, did she view being hated by him to be more crucial than losing her life?

——For what reason, did she think of everything like a goal, despite waiting for four-hundred years?

Subaru: "…I won't, hate you or anything."

Shaula: "————"

Subaru: "I do think that I probably had to face really hard situations because you kept quiet, and sometimes I honestly thought I'd never been cornered this badly."

Facing the silent Shaula, Subaru spoke his mind truthfully.

There were no lies here. Those were his true feelings. Because Shaula hid information as per her true intentions, Subaru had been unable to finally hit upon an answer, resultantly, was made to face mercilessly cruel deaths time and time again.

Not just Subaru. Aside from Subaru, Emilia and Beatrice and the others were made to, as well.

He could never forget the despair, discontentment, and hopelessness he felt during those moments.

That was why, if there were to be an existence who was the originator of all of that evil, Subaru would certainly never be able to forgive them, that was what he believed.

Then, at this instant, in front of Shaula like this, was he going to do the same?

Subaru: "——No."

He did not think of Shaula, she, who had lived four-hundred years in solitude, she, who had fulfilled the meaning of her being born in mere two days and was satisfied such that she gained happiness, to be the originator of that evil.

If there were to be an originator of that evil, it would be the unfairness of this world itself, and the one who created the circumstances where it was impossible to do anything about that, the Master who had commanded Shaula for four-hundred years——

Shaula: "——Ah."

Suddenly, a hoarse exhale leaked out of Shaula's lips.

Subaru: "Shaula?"

Shaula: "Ah, ah… ahhh, ah…"

Feeling abnormality in Shaula's condition in front of his eyes, Subaru called out her name. However, Shaula, without responding to Subaru's call, concealed her face with her palms.

A painfully trembling voice, unbefitting her, could be heard from that throat.

Shaula: "No, good… No good… Master! Master Master Master Master…!"

Subaru: "Shaula!? Shaula, what happened!? So suddenly…"

Shaula: "——Somebody, violated the rules."

Subaru: “————”

Rushing over, as Subaru jolted her white shoulders, his arms got grasped instead. And, while gripping on to Subaru’s arms with her slender ones to the extent of almost bringing him pain, Shaula spoke.

Gazing intently into Shaula’s eyes after she had spoken so, Subaru inhaled.

——An odd change was occurring in the dark pupils and irises of Shaula’s eyes.

Within her spherical eyes, the dark pupil and iris of her eyeball split into three, turning red and pulsating. The transfiguration occurred in the right and left eyeballs simultaneously, meaning that her dark pupils and irises had split into six.

——Six compound eyes, three on the left, three on the right.

Shaula: “Master…! Right now, I can still make it…”

Subaru: “Make it?”

Shaula: “Right now, if Master commands me, then I can… I can, still kill myself.”

With her eyeballs pulsating red, white steam slowly started to arise from the entirety of Shaula’s body. Her white skin was engulfed by a red tint, and even Subaru, who was standing right next to her, could feel the abnormal rise in body temperature.

The principle behind it was ambiguous—— Just that Shaula’s body was generating heat, and change was ensuing in it.

Perhaps, it was the initial phase of transforming into the form of the titanic scorpion.

Shaula: “If I transform, I won’t make it. I’ll become a cold-blooded *satsujin kikai*[229], and kill Master. I mean, I want Master so much… I want Master so badly, so badly that I can’t bear it, so…”

Subaru: “Before that happens…”

[229] Engrish flip. Means “killing machine” (殺人機械), originally “キリングマシーン” (killing machine).

Shaula: “Please tell me, to die… If you do that, for Master, I will…”

Come to an end before killing you, Shaula was unable to continue her words on to say that.

But in place of words, her eyes, her shivering voice, her entire body and soul, were conveying the same.

Subaru: “————”

An incomparable dread welled up in Subaru’s body as well. That was surely, the instinctive reaction of a human faced with otherworldly fear.

The human known as Natsuki Subaru, was frightened of the monster known as Shaula in front of him.

That was why, Subaru would——

Subaru: “Shaula, tell me the fifth rule.”

Shaula: “Master, this isn’t the time for…”

Subaru: “If you tell me that——!”

Subaru interrupted the words of the pleading Shaula with a loud voice. At that menacing glare, Shaula’s shoulders shivered. He grabbed those shivering shoulders. Warm. So much so that his palm could melt, Shaula’s body temperature had already risen to the temperature of a fire.

However, he did not let his hands go. Right now, he did not release her body, burning and scorching.

Subaru: “If you tell that to me, I’ll command you—— Stay calm. Before you turn into a monster, I’ll command you.”

Shaula: “————”

Hearing Subaru say that straightforwardly, Shaula widened her eyes.

She then called out to Subaru, saying “Master”,

Shaula: “Master, such a womanizer.”

Subaru: “I don’t remember being one…”

Shaula: “Then, Master is a Shaula-izer. My favorite kind of *izer*…”

Smiling weakly, Shaula softly overlapped the hands grasping her shoulders with her own. And——

Shaula: “——Fifth, it is not forbidden to destroy the Examinations.”

Subaru: “————”

Shaula: “Look, the color of my eyes has changed—— At my beloved, Master.”

Saying that, Shaula thrust Subaru’s chest away.

At that greater than expected might, Subaru was thrown back, unable to keep his grip onto her shoulders. When he looked towards his front while coughing faintly, Shaula, while hugging her own body, crouched down——

Shaula: “Ah, ah… ahhh, ahhhhhh… Hk!”

Red steam, like the color of blood, ascended from the entirety of her body. The steam had changed its color, it was a sign of danger. Shaula’s eyes lost its dark pupils and irises as well, and before one could notice, turned bright-red.

Shaula: “Master… hurry. Before I, lose myself…”

“————”

Shaula: “Please tell me… to die Hk! If Master says that, I will…”

With the same mouth which had argued being against Subaru and the others completing the Examinations and leaving the Tower, Shaula, using up her life, indicated the path where she could remain without killing Subaru and the others—— no, Subaru.

Hearing that desperate voice of Shaula’s, Subaru inhaled. And then,

Subaru: “Shaula.”

Shaula: “Master…”

Subaru: “——My bad. What I said just now was a lie.”

Shaula: “Eh?”

At Subaru’s words, informing her of that, Shaula rounded her eyes. Watching Shaula’s reaction for himself, Subaru halted his breath, and at the same pace, leapt backwards.

Having been pushed away by Shaula had been a blessing for him amidst all this misfortune—— Had Shaula kept a grab on his wrists, he would have never been able to perform this act.

——Subaru’s body crossed over the edge of the balcony, and was launched into the air.

Shaula: “Ah——”

Shaula’s voice, leaking immediately after, was engulfed in the vehement gusts of sand, rendered inaudible. With that, Subaru’s body, lost of any support, fell non-stop for several hundreds of meters.

Subaru: “————”

Falling down, he possessed no plans to save himself.

He had not prepared any plans to save himself. What Subaru had done was purely throw himself towards death. He did not desire to do this at all, nor did he want to speak of it but—— this had been his intention from the very beginning.

If these surroundings, these actions could be excused, he intended to surely do this.

That was because, Subaru could then trust his choice without any indecision. After all——

Shaula: “——Master!!”

Similarly jumping out from the balcony herself as well, Shaula chased after Subaru.

Widening those eyes, desperately stretching out her hand, Shaula leapt, pursuing the falling Subaru, not in an attempt to take away, but to save that life with her own hands.

——The true identity of the titanic scorpion, was Shaula.

——Shaula had purposefully hid the rules of the Tower.

——Shaula had repeatedly killed Subaru or his comrades, and stood in the way as the fifth obstacle.

But——

Subaru: "——I, just want to save you."

Shaula: "————"

He could never forget her appearance, she, who had endured her transformation against her own feelings, and had requested to be ordered to kill herself so that she would not kill Subaru, until the very end of the end.

Though it was quite a nasty thing to say, he wished to confirm that.

Whom he should save, whom he should not save, whom he should defeat, whom he should protect, whom he should love.

Because Natsuki Subaru believed he could not advance further unless he confirmed that.

No longer would he perplex over whom he should love.

Shaula: "——MASTEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEER!!"

Shaula's form, as she stretched out her hand in her attempt to pursue Subaru, changed midair.

Her hand stretching out enlarged, and transformed into large pincers clad in a jet-black shell. Her white skin was covered with a rough shell, without leaving any trace behind, and her flesh body expanded, as if bursting open from the interior.

For a single moment, the seemingly painful transformation that was akin to her blood and flesh bursting out, reached its conclusion as if a tape being reversed, converging, and finally, the immense ominous incongruity—— the titanic scorpion, had achieved completion.

And, that titanic scorpion's tail's tip nimbly established its aim at Subaru.

Illustration from Volume 24, coloring by Norvak (source)

Perhaps, tail stingers similar to that white luster would be fired from there, and burn Subaru's life to naught in an instant. The airborne Subaru lacked any technique to avoid that. However——

Subaru: "——I won't let myself be killed by you, because Shaula would cry."

Shaula: "————"

The tail stinger was fired—— but before that, arrived the terminus of his fall.

The two of Subaru and the titanic scorpion came falling down upon the hordes of Witchbeasts fiercely advancing onto the Tower of Sand. The result, Subaru was unable to witness it.

The existence known as Natsuki Subaru did not have the ability to endure that fall of several hundred meters.

Bursting open, his life was shed.

However, on the verge of his life being shed, he said a few final words——

Subaru: "——I, no matter what, will save you."

——He got the meager time, to convey the message to the sandy gusts, incomprehensible to the titanic scorpion.

Web Novel Volume 25

Web Novel
Volume
25
Author Nagatsuki Tappei
Illustrator Otsuka Shinichirou
Translators
Witch Cult Translations
Eminent Translations
Re:ゼロ
Re: Life in a different world from zero
から始める異世界生活

Arc 6 Chapter 71 - Count One

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 1 "■■■■■■ ■■■■■■■", Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——With his final words washed away by the wind, Natsuki Subaru's consciousness came to an end.

Subaru: "————"

Speaking of irony, ironically enough, his Death this time had been a Death by his own volition.

Perhaps that was why his mind and heart had remained calm at the moment of Death—— of course, that had not been the case, he had possessed uneasiness and nervousness for jumping into the circumstance of Death on his own accord.

However, unlike till now, he had faced the Death he had anticipated with much more sincerity than his other Deaths up to this time.

Of course, he did not believe that him choosing to die had truly saved Shaula.

She did not want to kill him, so she wanted him to command her to die.

Shaula, who had been concerned about Subaru to that extent, had let Subaru throw himself to his death right in front of her eyes. The weight of that impact, he did not know, and it must have immensely shattered her heart, which had continuously waited for four-hundred years.

That was why, that had been nothing more than Subaru's self-satisfaction. The worst kind of self-satisfaction, that of exaggerating and not seeing the result for himself with his own eyes. However——

Subaru: "——So what."

If all that was fastened to him was nothing but self-satisfaction, nothing but hypocrisy, what was wrong with that?

In the end, the method to catch and halt the impact of all happenings in this world could only be wielded in one's own weighing scales. Unaccomplished good deeds held no meaning, and the word known as hypocrisy did not ultimately exist.

——All of them, surviving.

After his discussion with Shaula, Subaru cemented the final objective he had touted.

——No, to be precise, the survival of all of them had been his goal from the beginning. Merely, that judgement on whether to include Shaula in that or not had been cast. Subaru had chosen to love all of them.

He shall lead the way to solve all the incidents surrounding the Tower of Sand.

For that purpose, he would do anything he could. That was——

Subaru: "The meaning, as to why I am myself—— Isn't that so, «Natsuki Subaru»."

Along with that instantaneous decision, he awakened from the deep, deep abyss of Death——

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???: "——Subaru, are you certain of what you said earlier?"

Subaru: "Yeah, don't be doubtful after coming this far. It's the information I collected after meeting it face-to-face and everything. If it couldn't be made the best use out of, I wouldn't bring it up!"

Replying harshly to the profile of the good-looking man running at an average speed, Subaru dashed while pulling a tiny palm.

Running past the Fourth Floor's aisle, they aimed for the Second Floor, Electra—— loaded with frustration, as Subaru sprinted whilst pulling Beatrice's hand, Julius's yellow eyes glanced sideways at him.

Julius: "Subaru, your paleness has not gotten any better. So indeed, the happening in the Book was…"

Subaru: "I'm not hiding how worried I am. Don't even try telling me I should've just quietly holed myself in the Green Room, you."

Julius: "I would recommend you to stay put were it not for this situation, but unfortunately things are quite bustling. Right now, we must use anything we can, even if they are mere grains of sand."

Subaru: "You've got nothing to say, so you'll call me using grains of sand, eh…"

Julius: "They can be thrown if the wind is meager enough. If possible, in a position capable of reaching the opponent's eyes."

Narrowing his eyes at the elegant eloquence, Subaru thought of his words about being thrown into the wind to be ironic.

Truth was, in terms of experience, Subaru's Death just a few minutes ago had been one of being thrown into the wind. Julius comparing Subaru's existence to grains of sand was not necessarily a mistake either.

Subaru: "But, grains of sand have their own qualities."

Beatrice: "On top of that, those grains of sand have Betty with them, I suppose. In other words, they're grains of sand with the cutest companion, in fact."

Subaru: "What, I guess you're talking about the sand that got into your shoes."

Beatrice: "That's not what that means, I suppose!"

Smiling at Beatrice, who puffed her cheeks, Subaru pulled her body by directing strength into his arm. Beatrice let out a shriek saying "Wah!", and her light frame fit tightly into Subaru's chest.

Running while pulling her hand was something quite romantic, but right now he wanted to prioritize speed. Fortunately, Beatrice's body was as light as an angel's feather, so carrying her and running was easy as well.

Subaru: "Well, I haven't ever carried an angel's feather, though."

Julius: "About time, idle talk ends here—— Subaru, I do believe it is annoying but…"

Subaru: "Yeah, it's annoying. Though I can't come up with words telling you to relax even if I rip my mouth apart, but… It's absolute that that guy Reid, and Gluttony will come in contact. We have to go, to hold that off."

Halting his legs, Julius asked while gazing at the humongous stairway that led to the Second Floor which lay ahead of them. Interrupting that inquiry, Subaru affirmed that he possessed confidence in it.

It was inconceivable for that to be untrue. After all, this was something he had heard from Julius himself. And, if they could obstruct this——

Subaru: "We can put out a *kabe*[230], against Reid messing everything up."

Julius: "…At any rate, it would be better if his trespassing can be avoided in this chaos. Even if it is just for confirming his movements, it is well worth it to make our way here."

Positioning his legs ahead of the humongous stairway, Julius nodded at Subaru. Returning a nod to that Subaru, whilst keeping Beatrice in his grasp, stepped onto the final level of the stairway. And——

Subaru: "——Gugh."

Beatrice: "Subaru, your condition really is bad, in fact. The Book's effect is visible, I suppose."

Beatrice looked at Subaru, who had shaken his head violently for a single moment and touched his cheek out of anxiety. Whilst gaining tranquility from the warmth of that small palm, Subaru shook his head, saying "I'm fine".

[230] Engrish flip. Means "barrier" (壁), originally "セーブ" (save).

Subaru: “Exhaustion from reading did not lower my wisdom. On top of that, it’s just as what I told Julius. This is no time to stay in bed—— This is the time when everyone should put their strength together.”

Beatrice: “…When about to really reach the limit, absolutely, tell Betty, in fact.”

Subaru: “…Yeah, I know.”

Responding to Beatrice, who was pressuring him based on her senses, Subaru took in a long, deep breath.

His body felt sluggish. His head felt heavy. His nausea was increasing without pause and he felt congestion in his blood vessels as if coal tar had been poured into them in place of blood.

All of this, was the result of Subaru taking over Ram’s inferior physical form through Cor Leonis.

Subaru: “————”

What he had harvested was the aftermath of having strode across Return by Death and the continuation of Cor Leonis’s existence—— Much like his uneasiness caused by the memories of Death, that Authority too had carried over.

Thanks to that he was able to grasp on the positions of his comrades at the current moment. Everyone was abiding by Subaru’s instructions, and had started to respond to each of the respective attacks.

Within those responses of his comrades also existed Meili, in the balcony, and Shaula, struggling fiercely. She was certainly there and fighting for Subaru and the others’—— no, for Subaru’s sake.

Subaru: “I, no matter what, will help you.”

With a short mutter, Subaru followed Julius’s back, who had gone ahead of him.

The humongous stairway, which jumped over one of the Tower’s floors to go to the Floor right above it, was lengthy. But neither was this the time to spit up complaints, nor the situation to leak whining.

His entire body was sore, his bones had been shattered to pieces, but they were a necessary compensation to break out of this situation. And——

Julius: “Subaru, let us advance!”

Julius's dignified voice resounded, and Subaru raised his face whilst running out of breath. And Julius, who had reached the utmost step, turned half of his body back and gestured to Subaru with his hand.

Abiding by that, the moment he galloped over the stairway, he was met with the space that had opened up.

Subaru: "————"

The complete opposite arrangement of rooms from the Fourth Floor, which had multiple rooms dividing the floor like a spherical wineglass that had been shattered. The Second Floor Electra, which divided all of their worth of existence by the Examination, is where they had arrived.

And, in Electra, where the three of Subaru, Beatrice and Julius had arrived, the First Generation Sword Saint, Reid, and the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony were——

Reid: "——Oi, ya prick. Is that all ya've got, ya prick. It ain't a joke, ya prick. Didn't'cha come here to entertain me, ya prick. Ya're lackin', ya prick. Don't'cha be makin' me laugh, ya prick. No, at least be makin' me laugh, aight, ya prick. It ain't amusin' or anythin', ya prick."

They came across a scene in which the Sword Saint Reid Astrea went on and on complaining, having grabbed a single leg of the young boy that had been mercilessly struck down onto the floor.

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Subaru: "————"

Julius: "This is…"

Staring at the spectacle before their eyes, the one to whisper that in blank surprise was Julius. However, Subaru's mental state witnessing the scene was absolutely the same as what he had whispered.

Then, what scene had they been expecting, was something quite difficult to determine now if it were to be mentioned——

Reid: “Aahn? What’s up, ya pricks. Y’all comin’ here too, ain’t that some enthusiasm. Or, do ya got business not with me, but with this guy?”

Gluttony: “Kah, kah, kah…”

Saying that, Reid scratched the area of his chest with his right hand, and with his other hand, the leg of the young boy he had in his grip—— the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, was lifted with the boy upside down, with Reid making a questioning look.

Just as mentioned before, what scene they had been expecting was something quite difficult to determine now if it were to be mentioned, but at the very least, this scene far surpassed what Subaru had assumed.

Subaru: “I had heard that Reid and Gluttony were negotiating, but…”

Beatrice: “Negotiating… this, I suppose? Betty thinks that even an exchange would be a lacking expression for this, in fact.”

Julius: “Yes, I agree. It is difficult to even call this a conversation.”

With that, Beatrice and Julius arrived at the same conclusion as what Subaru had whispered. However, the reaction of those two did not make sense from Subaru’s perspective.

Because the contact between Reid and Gluttony, the one to express it as negotiation from what he had heard last time, had been Julius, who must have witnessed a similar situation. In any case——

Subaru: “The scene where Gluttony got overwhelmingly whipped down, would that be correct?”

Though nobody had asked for it, that was how Subaru worded what he was witnessing.

In the white space of the Second Floor Electra, indeed, there remained in various spots traces of the one-on-one battle Gluttony and Reid had engaged in.

Aside from the crevices on the floor caused by being stepped firmly upon, or the cracks in the walls which gave the impression of being caused by slashing strikes, the traces of black burns caused by fires, and the scattered lumps of earth which were not supposed to be here, those precisely made clear the

characteristic of Gluttony. It was unmistakable that his lavish feasts had made for a department store of all kinds of special moves.

——And that department store of moves, had been struck and smashed to atoms by the natural disaster known as Reid.

Subaru: “Earthquake, thunder, fire, are all of them Reid…”

Reid: “So, what’re y’all gonna do, ya pricks. Do ya wanna go for the Examination? Ya can go for it since ya’ve a slightly nice expression. But, small fry, you can’t. Ah, ya can’t.”

Julius: “Why, is he an exception?”

Reid: “Don’t’cha get it just by takin’ a look. A guy who ain’t perfect or can’t even become someone to play games with, instead of bein’ imperfect, is just full of holes, ain’t that so. Don’t stand in front of me when ya’re like that. I start wantin’ to kill ya with a single finger, ya know. “

Gluttony: “G-GIYAAAAAH!!”

While saying that, Reid stabbed his right hand’s fingers into the torso of Gluttony, whom he had in his grip. With his guts being mercilessly gouged into, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony gave rise to an unseemly shriek.

Though it was unknown how old Gluttony physically was, even so, based on his outward appearance, the young boy of thirteen or fourteen years of age was being tormented by an adult; that sight gave rise to an emotion difficult to suppress.

It seemed as if Julius also had the identical feeling, and so——

Julius: “Reid Astrea, you must also possess dignity as a Knight. Then, what reason is there for you to torment that young boy any more than necessary…”

Reid: “Oi, ya prick, don’t’cha be sayin’ idiotic bullshit.”

Julius: “————”

Said Reid without changing the tone of his voice, declaring so whilst possessing only a sword spirit similar to penetrating cold in response to Julius, who had tried to offer commencing conversation from a fresh start.

Reid shook the body of Gluttony left and right with the leg he had grabbed,

Reid: “The dignity of a swordsmaaan? If ya scatter that ‘bout in exaggeration, that’s exactly why the thing called the preparedness of a swordsman exists. Are ya gonna be fightin’ without even the preparedness to die. If ya’re gonna have an attitude makin’ light of it like that, then there ain’t any choice but to teach it to ya with pain. Aye?”

Julius: “————”

The preparedness and dignity of a swordsman, if that argument were to be placed on the battlefield, the one to be at the inferior position would be Julius. On top of the matter of pride having been touted, Reid’s words about preparedness possessed a constant persuasive power.

On top of that, though the visible person was painful to even look at,

Subaru: “If Gluttony collapses, then the result certainly is *ari*[231]…”

Though obvious, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony was not included in his touted objective of everyone’s survival.

The ones Subaru wanted to save were only Emilia, Beatrice, Ram, Rem, Meili, Echidna, Julius and Shaula. On top of that, the two of Patrasche and Gian.

Gluttony and Reid were not subject to that. If the two of them were to crush each other—— though an outcome too unilateral to be called a result, it was advantageous for Subaru and the others should that happen. However——

Reid: “First of all, ya pricks. Is this guy yer buddy? If that’s so, then it ain’t as if I don’t get why ya’re gettin’ so heated up…”

[231] Engrish flip. Means “alright/acceptable” (あり), originally “オーライ” (alright).

Julius: “No, absolutely not. That Sin Archbishop of Gluttony is a bitter enemy of myself as well, an opponent with whom, in the worst-case scenario were I to fight to the extremity, one may end up taking the other’s life.”

Reid: “Eh? Then why’re ya gettin’ so mad? Cause yer prey got snatched away?”

Julius: “——It is because, you are kicking the pride of a swordsman.”

So told Julius the Sword Saint—— the man who had been the first one to hold that title, bestowed upon only those who stand at the pinnacle of the sword.

That declaration of Julius’s, which could not even be an insult, was silently being heard by Reid who narrowed his eye not covered by the eyepatch.

Upon the awaiting gaze of the Sword Saint, Julius continued as if slashing the atmosphere.

Julius: “If battling swordsmen, warriors, Knights is something where one must prepare his body for death beforehand, then it is fine to submit to losing one’s life at the extremity of the battle. However that, at most, is the extremity of battle, death at the extremity upon the exhaustion of all of one’s desperate efforts. That is how it should be. The victor, absolutely, must not play around with the life of the defeated.”

Reid: “…Ya’re sayin’ shit that’s makin’ my ears itchy. Who the hell’s gonna be listenin’ to all that.”

Julius: “I do not mind should they be named as even inexperienced ideals, or sweet nothings! Merely, embodying those ideals and sweet nothings is the way of the Knight I believe in.”

Reid: “————”

With that bold assertion, Julius unsheathed his own Knight’s sword.

From what he had heard, this Knight’s sword had been fractured once—— it was supposedly not a sword he was familiar using, hence, it was something suspicious which his hand was yet growing accustomed to.

But above all, what certainly had always been in his fundamental values, those would never waver.

That was because they had certainly, always continued to shimmer within his self.

That shimmering something, did not let Julius overlook Reid's unjustness.

Even if the one to fall victim to that unjustness should be a Sin Archbishop, someone who had committed grave atrocities.

Reid: "——The way of the Knight, aye."

Beyond all expectation, that whisper jolted the atmosphere in Electra.

That was, a quiet tone of voice.

That was, not a voice harboring emotions of little significance.

That was, nothing but an echo which seemed as if it had slipped in amongst the other nonchalant and bored echoes.

——However, that was the signal of eruption of the First Generation Sword Saint, Reid Astrea.

Reid: "Oi, ya prick. How long're ya gonna be sleepin'. Wake the hell up."

Gluttony: "Gyiii!"

As he groaned and directed strength of grip such that he could crush that grabbed leg with his hand, Gluttony responsively shrieked upon his leg almost being crushed. And, Reid looked down onto the upside down Sin Archbishop,

Reid: "Ya prick, ya said some interestin' shit, ain't that so. Ya said ya're gonna eat me up, taste me up, lick me up, aye? ——I'll, let ya do that."

Gluttony: "——Gihi, gaha, ahahaha! What's up with that! What's that what's that, what happened so suddenly! Why do you feel like that, so suddenly, red-haired onii-san! Even though you swung we or us around so much because you were against that huuuh!"

Reid: "I changed my mind—— Ahh, right, right."

Removing the distortion of his face caused by pain, Gluttony tried regaining his state of health as Reid glared at him. After that, as if having suddenly noticed something, Reid rotated his neck around,

Reid: “People like ya prick are gonna be intrudin’ right away anyway, ain’t that so.”

Remarkably saying that, Reid stepped ahead diagonally.

At that moment, shining violet crystals were thrown into the spot Reid was standing on. A shrill sound as that of shattering glass reverberated, and the violet arrows themselves along with the floor smashed and got scattered about.

However, they had missed their aim. And Reid, who had been their aim, took a single step and leapt, shortening his distance to Subaru and the others who had commenced that attack just now.

Beatrice: “——Hk! Subaru, not good, I suppo…”

Reid: “Here.”

Beatrice’s warning rendered fruitless, Gluttony was struck into Subaru’s torso, delivering a side blow.

Handling a human as a blunt weapon, the unstoppable force mercilessly sent Subaru, who had been carrying Beatrice, flying.

Subaru: “Gahagh!!”

Reid: “It’s good ya didn’t hesitate, ya pricks. This is way better than that beautiful girl in terms of fightin’. Well, the broken fragments of yer ability haven’t been reassembled, tho’.”

Without the leeway to even respond to Reid’s brief review, Subaru rolled over while holding Beatrice with all his might. He could not help but feel as if the origin of his life had been shorn off, with his internal organs overturned by the single blow just now, accompanied with Ram’s physical burden.

Julius: “Subaru! Beatrice-sama! Kgh… Hk.”

And whilst fearing for the blown away Subaru and Beatrice, Julius, in a single instant performed a piercing strike towards Reid, who had shortened the distance between them. However, Reid strode on and

crushed that with his feet, then switching the leg he used as a pivot, hammered a kick into Julius's abdomen.

Though Julius received that with the handle of the Knight's sword he had instantaneously drawn, he was unable to block being lunged through by the shockwave as well. With his guts churned by the perforating single blow, he flew far towards his back. And meanwhile——

Reid: "Here, try it out 'n see. To eat me up, or to die just like this by bein' played 'round by me, choose one what'cha'd like or I'll have no choice but to make a move. Ain't that the thing called life, oi, ya prick."

Gluttony: "——Ahh, ahhh, ahhh! We get it, we do get it, we really get it, we completely get it, as we get it, so we get it, as we want to get it, because we get it! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony! We'll do as per your wish! It's impossible for us to stay without eating."

Remaining upside down, raising his face right towards the front, Gluttony smiled at Reid. And, Gluttony stretched his hand, grabbing the area of Reid's left eye which had been concealed by the eyepatch.

He subsequently opened his mouth and——

Gluttony: "Reid Astrea."

Licking, Gluttony let go of Reid from his hand, as if tearing something off. And, gazing lovingly at his palm where that something was not even present, he exposed his tongue.

At the same pace, he chewed that invisible something, and reverberated a slurping sound as if indulging in it. Afterwards——

Reid: "——Ah."

Abruptly, change arrived in a single instant.

As if it had been an illusion or something, Reid's form vanished in the blink of an eye. With the tall figure disappearing from the space it was certainly supposed to be in, Gluttony, whose leg had been grabbed, fell onto the floor. At the same pace, he dexterously righted himself using his hands and Gluttony made an agile landing, looking at his own palm.

What was recurring in those eyes, was something close to the nothingness, desolateness, dismay of seemingly a gourmet delicacy, which had exhausted its extravagance, disappearing from the top of the platter——

Gluttony: “Ahhh, so amaziiing. That kind of flavor, this kind of flavor, which kind of flavor would it be like, we imagined a lot a lot a loooot about it, but… it was above expectations!”

Subaru: “He ate, Reid…?”

Gluttony: “Ahhh, you saw that, right!? We did eat him! We indeed ate him! Really, isn’t it the best, this is a flavor which cannot be imagined! Even we, who are called something like Bizarre Eating, are able to get it because of this guy’s rich taste! Even without knowing Ley’s say——”

Leaning backwards, whilst touching own sharp canines Gluttony praised Reid’s flavor. As far as thought could go, it was the worst food report in human history—— which was halted halfway through.

It was not as if something had barged in as an obstruction. Its origin lay in Gluttony himself.

Gluttony: “——Wha? Ah, ah, ahh~, ahh~, ahhhhhh~?”

Beatrice: “J-just, what is starting this time, in fact…”

Subaru: “No, that’s…”

Putting his hands on his own throat and abdomen, Gluttony started making movements as if practicing speech. Though Beatrice found that state to be ominous, Subaru had an idea regarding this abnormality.

If the exchange between Reid and Gluttony just a moment ago—— if that was what Julius spoke of as “negotiation”, then,

Gluttony: “W-w-waiii~, wait, hiii, gihh, gihihi. Strange, it’s strange, isn’t it strange! After all, this is… Ya prick, ain’t it odd?”

Everyone: “————”

Gluttony: “It ain’t odd, ya prick. Eat or be eaten, that’s how life works, ain’t that so.”

Strangling his own throat, Gluttony fired words as if answering his own questions. That tone of voice met clear change, and as if pulled into the change of that tone of voice, change ensued in Gluttony's flesh body itself.

It was a change as if the waxing and waning of the moon, questioning when did it even happen was appropriate for it.

Subaru did not avert his eyes at all.

The same went for Beatrice, who was being held to his chest, and of course Julius, who had taken stance with his sword. However, whilst remaining captured in the field of vision of the three, the very form of Gluttony was erased in an instant.

And instead, the one standing at the spot where Gluttony had been was——

???: "——Ah, a fresh body sure's different. Feels like blood's flowin' thro' flesh. I'm already feelin' hungry. At least come after fillin' yer stomach, ya precocious brat."

Pronouncing so, the one who had carried out substituting for the previous player, having exited the stage known as the Pleiades Watchtower for merely a scant ten seconds, the existence who was blooming a second time at the center of the stage, was Reid.

Reid Astrea had stolen the flesh body of the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, achieving resurrection into the present world.

Julius: "This is…"

The result of the negotiations between Reid and Gluttony from Julius's perspective.

Of course, the details of the content of the conversation between Reid and Gluttony must have changed due to Subaru and the others' intervention, but it should have been roughly the same. In other words——

Subaru: "What the hell's the negotiation, speaking while putting on airs…"

Beatrice: "Subaru, this isn't the time to be saying all that, I suppose. Gluttony has disappeared, and Reid has…"

Subaru directed a rough remark towards Julius's pretentious phrasing the previous time. Within those arms, Beatrice called for further vigilance, but Subaru patted her head lightly and gazed towards Reid——

Subaru: "Strictly speaking, you used the Authority of Gluttony, which reconstructs eaten opponents, against your opponent, and painted out their own self… is that right?"

Reid: "Don't'cha go 'round sayin' tough bullshit. Like I'd know such convenient shit. So, don't swagger 'bout with shit I'd have no way in hell knowin', damn small fry. Small fry? Ahhh~, hm? Ya prick… Ahh? Ya prick, this, ya prick, that's it, ain't it, ya prick."

Subaru: "——?"

Though his spirit had hijacked that flesh body, Reid made a wry face unrelated to that truth. He unusually groaned, and gently put a finger in his own eyepatch. And turning it over, he looked at Subaru with his healthy blue eye which had no particular need for an eyepatch.

Looking, gazing, staring,

Reid: "——Ya prick, ya're pretty disgustin'."

Subaru: "————"

Reid: "Good job not havin' yer head gettin' screwed up with that. No, has it gotten so? What it'll be precisely 'cause it's gotten so, I ain't got any idea. I haven't even given it a thought."

Subaru: "————"

What is he saying, thinking that, Subaru got truly perplexed upon Reid's attitude.

On top of being perplexed, the shivering and nausea enveloping his entire body were about to hit the critical point. Though obvious, Ram's inferior physical form was worsening as Ram's body increased its voltage higher and higher, and the recoil she was originally supposed to have felt was being sent to Subaru.

This time, Subaru had not personally met up with Ram, so there were no means for Ram to find out the reason why her body was working so well.

Thinking of it now, it seemed as if Ram had been concerned regarding Subaru last time as well.

Though he had noticed Ram's concern, who was not in this place, only after dying twice——

Reid: "I see I see I do see. I ain't got any idea, but it looks like ya're the one these guys're aimin' for, ain't that so. Then that makes things faster."

Julius: "Reid! Your opponent is myself!"

Stepping ahead, Julius fired a slashing strike. But Reid attempted to receive that with the chopsticks he had drawn out from his bosom. However——

Reid: "Ahhn?"

The slashing strike grazed the tip of the chopsticks, and blood spouted out of Reid's right hand, despite his wishes to block it. Looking at that Reid made a suspicious look, Julius raised his eyebrows in faint surprise as well. And——

Subaru: "————"

For having witnessed that with his own eyes, that alone was a harvest for Subaru.

Reid: "Tch."

Clicking his tongue, Reid gyrated his chopsticks as if spinning a pen between the gap of his fingers and adroitly repelled Julius's Knight's sword. In the same movement, stepping ahead with a single stomp, he lapsed the distance between him and Julius, who had instantaneously drawn his body back, and aimed his palm towards his abdomen,

Reid: "Your opponent is myself, did ya say that?"

Julius: "Kuh——"

Reid: "No way ya'll be gettin' to have an exchange with me, after havin' been carried like a princess!"

The sole of the palm was twisted further, creating an explosion on Julius's abdomen; his slender tall figure was blown away backwards, still bleeding. He tried to position his lengthy legs to the floor in order

to kill off the momentum, but failing to do so, Julius's body turned upward at the bottom on the floor, and with that, tumbled over.

And thus, concluding his battle with Julius, having widened the distance in-between them, Reid turned back,

Subaru: "Shh!!"

Aiming for Reid's profile, Subaru fired the whip which was at the back of his waist. However, without the occurrence of a miracle such as his body still remembering it, the tip of the whip flew towards the wrong direction.

The effect of the loss of memories was not only in his mind, but also affecting the actions his flesh body had once taken. As a result of fully realizing that, Subaru took in a heavy inhale.

At the same time as that——

Reid: "Ya prick, with such a borin' trick…"

Beatrice: "——That boring trick, is the recommendation of you getting an end of being buried, in fact."

Going past his amazement, Reid expressed his rage, and from his hind echoed the loud sound of striking hands. Upon looking that had been Beatrice, who had both her hands free, a distance away from Subaru.

However, even if their hands were unconnected, there was a certain connection between them. Beatrice extracted an extremely small amount of something like MP from that pass she had with Subaru—— and exercised great magic.

Beatrice: "——Ul Shamak."

The moment immediately after Beatrice's chant had achieved completion, what arose in the space was an enormous black hole.

That which had appeared all of a sudden in the air, manifested as an existence accompanied by primordial fear such as its unknown bounds and unknown depths, and tried to swallow Reid, who was right before it.

Subaru: “That, is…”

At a single glance, it could be understood that it was a great magic that affected space.

This was more of an issue of imaging it so, rather than having knowledge about it. Subaru had heard of Beatrice being a wasteful Spirit, but the actual power held by truly great magic could not even be in the same league of comparison.

Subaru had been unaware, that this was even possible. This was, a harvest.

That black hole swallowed Reid, and repelled away his Sword Saint off to somewhere unknown——

Reid: “The hell, it’s just air. Somethin’ like air’s everywhere, as if it’d stop me.”

Subaru: “————”

With just a single swing of his chopsticks, Reid broke through that immense magic with extreme easiness.

A carefree attitude as if, quite literally, slashing through air—— no, for him, it truly was exactly that. He did not have the nature of taking roundabouts around something which he was capable of doing and then boasting about it.

He had slashed the air, so that was his explanation. That was all there was to it.

Subaru: “Slashing dimensions, as far as I know, gives me an *eizou*[232] of being quite the top-rank ability, you know…”

Reid: “Oioi, don’t’cha put such cool names on it, the climax can be better, ya know. If ya’ll stay persistent just ‘cause things’ve gotten a bit lively, that won’t be amusin’ or anythin’, ya know.”

Swinging his chopsticks at the same angle as when he had slashed Beatrice’s magic, the moment immediately afterwards, Subaru’s body burst open, from his chest to his waist, in a diagonal.

Subaru: “Gah, AHHHH!!”

[232] Engrish flip. Means “mental picture” (映像), originally “イメージ” (image).

Beatrice: “Subaru!!”

Julius: “Subaru—— Hk!”

Tasting the sensation of scorching heat, Subaru collapsed on the spot as Beatrice and Julius called for him. Upon the voices of those two, Subaru gnashed his molars and glared at Reid with bloodshot eyes.

And, turning his palm towards the two trying the rush up to him, he managed to halt their legs.

Subaru: “I’m… al, right…”

Shaking his head left and right, he urged the two to not worry for him. Of course, there was no way he could truly convince them simply by conveying such words to the two.

The chest wound, was shallow—— No, it was not shallow. Though it was not shallow, it did not ache. It could be expressed as not being unbearable. At any rate, though it was bitter, it was alright. It was not worthy of making those two experience bitter, painful emotions. Gnashing molars, the blood on the verge of being vomited—— was it nausea? Whichever it was, vomiting must be restrained from. Facing the front, glaring ahead, Reid must be carefully observed.

Reid: “As if ya can reach me with that, ya prick.”

With a stunned expression, Reid was looking at Subaru, who was bleeding out of his lips.

Facing that Reid, Subaru stretched out his hand, and raised a single finger.

Subaru: “——Y-yeah. I will, reach you.”

Even right now. I can reach you. In a place not necessarily here.

I will, for sure, save Emilia, Beatrice, Ram, Rem, Meili, Echidna, Julius, Shaula, Patrasche, Gian.

Without failing, a single person.

Gluttony and Reid are exceptions—— The “Natsuki Subaru” who is not Natsuki Subaru as well.

That is why, right now, at this moment——

Subaru: "——This is, *count one*[233]."

Accreting the Deaths necessary for a counterattack, was an accomplishment of "Natsuki Subaru's" as well.

At the very end of the end, Reid's blue eyes sheened a dull flash towards Subaru, who had made that declaration.

※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※

Count 1.

- *The fight between Reid and Gluttony cannot be stopped.*
- *If it's Julius, then there's a chance for him to succeed.*
- *——Natsuki Subaru, has no chance of succeeding.*

[233] This, much like the title of the chapter, is Engrish. Keeping as-is because it's preferred like this by the community.

Arc 6 Chapter 72 - ■■ ● ■[234]

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 1 "■■■■■■ ■■■■■■■", Parts 4-7

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Upon the advent of unforeseen Death, Natsuki Subaru heard the sound of ■ cracking.

However, upon each instance of that inexorable sound, he thought.

That it was certainly the proof of his progress not having come to a halt. That it was, the footsteps of the approaching future.

No matter how small those steps were, no matter how trifling the path he had advanced upon was, he was certainly, walking and progressing.

???: "——Subaru."

Subaru: "————"

The moment his consciousness was led to awakening, blue eyes of a characteristic pattern were reflected into his own. In front of his eyes, peeping at Subaru worriedly, was Beatrice.

Beatrice's hand was gently placed on Subaru's cheek, and Subaru inhaled.

He had parted with Beatrice's crying face not too long ago.

That switchover of consciousness had not been carried out well. Just previously, though it could not be associated with something as extravagant as a parting, she certainly had been in Subaru's eyes.

[234] Each of the blocks is hiding one Japanese character. Given the ● is usually employed as a separator for characters' names, it most likely denotes a character's name.

Subaru: "…Ah."

Beatrice: "Are you truly conscious, I suppose? It took time for you to wake up till now, it was worrying, in fact. It'd be better to confirm you did not lose any memories accidentally, I suppose. To start with, do you recall who Betty…"

Subaru: "Bea, trice…"

Beatrice: "——It seems you do remember properly, in fact. Good boy good boy, I suppose."

Saying that, Beatrice stretched the hand she had at Subaru's cheek towards his head. At the same pace, she patted him with her tiny palm and slowly, his consciousness caught up to reality.

Subaru: "*Count one*, huh…"

Beatrice: "——?"

Beatrice tilted her head upon the whispering voice. However, neither did she know what it meant, nor did he intend to explain it. She might not understand even if he were to explain, and he did not intend to make her understand either.

She was kind. Beatrice, was extremely kind.

That was why, what Subaru was testing things out. If he were to tell her about that, it was a given that she would be absolutely against it—— That was, something which Beatrice must not be allowed to know.

Beatrice: "So, how did it go, in fact? Was the purpose of reading the Book fulfilled, I suppose?"

Subaru: "——Yeah, about that."

That is what Beatrice asked Subaru, who still had the Book placed on his knees.

The moment immediately before the immediately previous moment—— the moment immediately before Subaru had disregarded his own physical state, Subaru had just been seeking a way to defeat "Reid Astrea" and had been just about to read his Book of the Dead.

That had come to a standstill due to complicated reasons, and multitudes of situations got caught in between the interval such that that would feel as if it were quite an old topic—— though that went only for Subaru, at maximum.

Things he ought to do, things he must do, they had all been decided. That was why——

Subaru: "Beatrice, it'll be getting a bit confusing—— Lend me, your strength."

Beatrice: "——That's a given, in fact. Betty is Subaru's *aikata*[235], I suppose."

So promised Beatrice to Subaru, who had broken the ice without any explanations.

Her existence was, truly, very truly, reassuring for the ■.

△▼△▼△▼△

——The impact, jumped around freely in the aisle of the stone Tower.

???: "Haha! Hahaha! You're doing it, you're quite doing it, you're surely doing it, perhaps you're doing it, you've been doing it, you've done it, because you've been doing it! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!"

???: "Is there any time to be playing around? That is quite the pliability, isn't it."

Using the walls, ceilings of the aisle as a foothold, making free use of transforming tactics at will from next to next was the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Ley Batenkaitos.

And the one rushing around at high speeds, having kept the inferior physical form of her body someplace else and moving around nimbly, was Ram.

Her petite frame fluttered about and danced, and directed merciless blows in the direction of Gluttony's body, who countered with equivalent fiendishness. At that point, rushing in as having been waiting for that was——

[235] Engrish flip. Means "partner (who shares one's load)" (相肩), originally "パートナー" (partner). The word chosen isn't the best here, but given Subaru and Beatrice's deep relationship, it feels fitting.

???: “——Wroom, and, BOOM!”

Wielding a large ice hammer in both of those hands, swinging it as if aiming for a home run was Emilia.

The damaging portion of the ice hammer, as large as a human’s trunk, turned into a strike with all her might and made a firm hit onto Ley’s back. The small frame bounced and flew along with a thunderous roar like a gum ball.

——No, his flight had too much momentum to it.

Instantly kicking the ice hammer, he himself had jumped ahead as to stifle the impact.

Ley: “Ahawahaaa! You’re doing it doing it doing iiit~! But but, that won’t do! That can’t defeat us!”

Emilia: “——Hk, he’s fast!”

In response to Gluttony displaying moves with a touch of acrobatics, Emilia made a frustrated expression on her cute face.

Past and present, east and west, chewing the experts of all kinds of master arts, demonstrating abilities that were, quite literally, from “every single kind of martial arts” was the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Ley’s fighting strength—— or perhaps, it should be called his ability to respond. It had attained preeminence, a remarkable difference of unleashing optimal techniques of the highest peak each moment to the next.

Subaru: “If efforts and the training both are encompassed in the Memories, then…”

Though it was quite hateful, perhaps Gluttony did not even have a need “pull things out” consciously. When they would come to notice, the body would have body already moved, that was the kind of Authority it was, of pulling them out in all kinds of scenes.

——The stolen Memories even included the experience points of the physical body.

That was also evident by Subaru not remembering how to use the whip he carried around whatsoever. It seemed that the whip had been Subaru’s main weapon before losing his memories, but the correct way to hold it and swing it, he could remember none of it altogether.

In the first place, why had he chosen something like a whip as his main weapon?

It would be easier to make better use out of than a sword or a lance, it must have been a shallow thought like that. Though there were no objections to that itself——

Subaru: “I wish I would’ve thought of a counterplan in case I lost my memories…!”

Of course, he was aware it was an absurd request, however, Subaru still cursed it. By doing that, for a single moment, he was able to forget his effeminate jealousy towards his disappeared Memories.

The jealousy towards the disappeared Memories, towards “Natsuki Subaru”.

Beatrice: “Subaru, asking again, in fact. Are you really alright, I suppose?”

Towards Subaru’s profile, Beatrice raised her voice.

Upon the question of the girl who had been supporting Subaru’s body, Subaru nodded with a “Yeah” as he shrugged his shoulders,

Subaru: “Right now, the fight’s even… If we can break it down, our way to victory will…”

Beatrice: “——But, Betty is reluctant about leaving Subaru’s side right now, in fact.”

Subaru: “But, it’s necessary. You understand, right, Beatrice…”

Beatrice: “That is——”

Subaru: “Lend me, your strength. Once again… I request you.”

While maintaining meticulous caution among the ceaseless shocks, trying not to have his voice tremble, Subaru blackmailed Beatrice with an unfair manner of speaking.

In response to those cruel words of request of Subaru’s, Beatrice closed her eyes, making a strained expression.

Lend me your strength, that was the gist of the conversation they had also had in the Library of Taygeta.

However, that time had been before Subaru had activated Cor Leonis, and neither had Beatrice known that the situation of the Pleiades Watchtower had deteriorated this much.

That was why, this was a heinous technique of Subaru's which gripped onto Beatrice's kindness.

Beatrice: "————"

Beatrice scrutinized Subaru's proposal with a difficult face.

The sudden deterioration of Subaru's physical condition and the recovery of Ram's fighting strength which accompanied it—— the connection between them was evident, and Ram, Beatrice, and even Emilia had noticed Subaru's rash perseverance.

But still, everyone knew they could not tell him to stop.

——For Subaru being burdened with his hardship was why this battlefront was still up, even if barely.

Talk in name only, if Subaru were to unfasten Cor Leonis here and care for himself, the first to happen afterwards would be Ram collapsing, then Emilia would get her Name eaten by Gluttony, their cooperation would crumble and they would be defeated.

And should Gluttony be rendered free, the power balance of the Tower would fall into an unrecoverable state; ultimately, everyone would die in defeat and that'd be game over.

Subaru: "…In the end, me being burdened is the best, the better option."

Subaru, who could never really be of any help even when he was acting rash, was making strides in the fighting strength by taking over Ram's inferior physical form. That was, an absolute requirement for capturing the Tower.

Correctly speaking, even in the efficacy of Cor Leonis, there lay a trap not easy to solve.

That was the fact that, consciously or subconsciously, Ram was saving up a bit of her fighting strength.

Subaru: "————"

With overwhelming sense and techniques beyond comprehension, Ram maintained a firm balance in the place.

In spite of that, the reason why she had not gone further in order to overcome the opposition was because Ram had imposed a limiter on her own fighting strength—— The reason for her faltering, was because she was having careful consideration for Subaru's status.

If Ram were to move to the fullest, it would impose an enormous burden onto Subaru.

Subaru would not be able to endure that. That possibility, was putting a halt on Ram's limbs.

Truth was, something similar had occurred when he had gone around towards Julius and Reid.

It had been confirmed he was capable of taking over Ram's inferior physical form through Cor Leonis itself without having to meet up with her—— however, in a situation where Ram were unaware of the interrelation between her own favorable state and Subaru's state, Ram would spare no quarter on her fighting strength.

As a result, the backfire, lacking any regret, scorched only Subaru and did not lead to mutual harm.

That would also mean the end for Ram's time as standing unrivalled, the worst kind of mutual harm.

It was not possible to continue sprinting with one's entire strength for long while lacking oxygen. That was all there was to it.

Henceforth, drawing up Ram's fighting strength through Cor Leonis, in terms of results, Ram's judgement to save onto her abilities was correct. Being balanced was the best.

However, by making use of the limitless arts of war he had plundered, Gluttony was indeed following and keeping up with that improvement of Ram's combat power. Emilia was compensating for the parts where he could not be pushed away, but still, Gluttony could not be distanced away from, continuing to eat away with an extraordinary ability to survive.

That was why, for that end——

Beatrice: "——Minya!!"

Enough to envelop the entire aisle, violet crystals materialized and were fired in a single action.

Acting in consent with Beatrice's chant, who swung her small arm downwards, the concentrated attack of the magic called Yin Magic swooped down onto Ley, who had turned his back towards this side, with tremendous vigor.

Immediately afterwards the boisterous dance of violet light swallowed the petite frame, engulfing the aisle with the sound of shattering glass.

Ley: "————"

Within the fluttering flakes of violet, dancing and falling, leaping away from the attack's span were the pair made up of Emilia and Ram. Evading the line of fire with instantaneous judgement, it was as expected of their physical ability to quickly avoid it.

On the other hand, having been in the same circumstance, albeit delayed for having his back turned to it, Ley had been unable evade it easily the way Emilia and Ram had.

It was a magic to be feared which crystallized the struck targets, turning them into a brittle and transient existence and smashing them.

If Minya, capable of bestowing fatal wounds even through light contact, were to be fire to such reckless extent in a range this confined, it would be difficult for an enemy, even if transcendent, to survive unhurt.

Once the dance of the light which had been given rise to by the violet arrows came to a halt, the form of Gluttony who had taken enormous damage was—— not there.

Beatrice: "——Hk!?"

Emilia: "Eh!? Where did…"

Beatrice inhaled in astonishment whilst Emilia made a strained expression and looked around.

Within the chaos, the one to get a grasp on the situation the fastest truly had been Ram.

She put her hand on her own right eye, and with only her left eye open, turned back. Subaru knew there was something like a path connecting him and Ram through Cor Leonis.

Ram, had activated some type of technique. Using that peculiar power, she understood where specifically the disappeared Gluttony was. His whereabouts were——

Ram: “Barusu!”

Subaru: “————”

Ram shouted, widening her light-crimson eyes.

At that moment, from her line-of-sight, Subaru comprehended the arrival of a hazardous presence right behind them. One that was aiming for Subaru’s—— no, Beatrice’s back.

With the interruption by Minya just now, did it intend to convey that she had polluted the battle?

At any rate, it was not vastly different from the transpiring happening.

Ley: “——We must say, if that one right now was to be continued consecutively, it’ll be getting tiresome, so.”

Accompanying the sneering words, the dagger fastened to his arm flashed.

That strike came from Ley, who had leapt through space and escaped the concentrated attack of violet arrows. In line with the frequent usage of the Fist King, the odd talent of the one who had become the Leaper—— it could be named a short-range warp.

According to what had been seen, it seemed as if there were certain limits to the distance, but still the compatibility of the strange talent of jumping through space and of performing encircling attacks was the worst.

Carrying no significance regarding the type of the surprise attack, in the end, anything aside from getting involved in the head-on match was——

Subaru: “Beatrice”

Beatrice: “Suba——”

Thoughts and actions, ■ and body did not always coincide.

The moment instantly after he pushed the small body away by reflex, a piercing sensation deeply gouged out his chest.

Subaru: “Kah.”

Like scratching a scab with claws, no, the pain and impact was several thousand times that. He instantly regretted having received that with his chest. Though he regretted it, no other convenient shield had been present there.

Bewildered by the momentary judgement, he shuddered at the mere thought of Beatrice having been slashed down. So much so that he thought it would be better for him to become a shield of flesh compared to that. It was painful, though it was painful, if it was merely pain, merely the wound on his body, it would last for only an instant. Not even an instant. But, it was much better than ■ being wounded.

Much better, than ■ dying.

???: “Subaru—— Hk!!”

A loud voice echoed within the Tower, and upon an attempt to turn back and see to whom it belonged, his knees snapped.

Strength faded away from his limbs surprisingly easily. Pathetically fragile, he was unable to support even his head. Even an infant could hold his head still but what was this man, who had significantly aged, doing.

Such that even this frivolous talk would not come to mind, his consciousness fell into the sole of the deep, dark hole.

A vivid ache and sense of loss, scorched his brain.

Subaru: “——Gih.”

Whilst wanting to give rise to a shriek, he endured his voice trying to escape by grinding his teeth.

It was not as if he would feel any better if he were to let it out. It was not as if he would feel any better if he were to not let it out. However, there were people here who would surely have their ■ shattered, if Subaru were to cry out now.

I cannot allow that. Because I cannot do so, stay silent and die. Natsuki Subaru.

Ley: "——How nice, onii-san. So you will be going to the next one by doing thaaat?"

There echoed a voice overlooking Subaru, who had powerlessly crumbled down while continuing to resist screaming.

He had endured his screaming. However, he could not possibly endure that mocking voice.

Subaru: "————"

In a situation where his limbs had been rendered completely incapable of moving, he directed strength into his arm and moved his finger.

And, with a single middle finger raised, his lips moved.

Subaru: "Die, idiot."

After that, his consciousness came to a halt——

△▼△▼△▼△

Count 2.

- *Having Emilia and Ram cooperate, aiming for an early settlement with Ley Batenkaitos, met failure.*
- *Timing is essential for taking over Ram's inferior physical form through Cor Leonis.*
- *——Beatrice's surprise attack is incompatible with Gluttony.*

△▼△▼△▼△

——Fiercely, the enshrouding clouds of sand were trying to enwrap the field of vision.

???: "————KRUAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!"

With his entire body swinging around at the sensation of violently swaying about, Subaru desperately clung on, trying not to be thrown off. Ahead of him, a pigtail was shaking about left and right.

???: "——Work hard, Sand Earthworm-chan!"

In accordance with Meili's call, the Sand Earthworm made its large build tremble, and hammered its head in with potency. Being swallowed by that shockwave gave rise to an immense loss amongst the troops of the advancing horde of Witchbeasts.

However, those lost troops were covered in the matter of a few seconds, trampling upon the scattered corpses of their own kind, the hordes of Witchbeasts continued to push in without halting their feet—— The situation of the battle, was unfavorable.

???: "————"

Under their eyes—— no, in all directions, innumerable Witchbeasts advanced. With those as her opponents, Meili made free use of her preparations, which in no way could be stated to be sufficient, struggling fiercely.

Honestly speaking, Meili's efforts, as she controlled the Witchbeasts, were hard to notice from an outsider's perspective. She ordered instructions to the Witchbeast and abiding by that, the fiendish monster would rampage about. There was no mystery in that if that alone was to be observed. However——

Meili: "Haa, haak."

Looking at her shape, with sweat on her forehead and her occasionally agonizing inhalations, it could perhaps be understood at a single glance that it was a recognition too difficult to observe.

Meili: "Haa, fuu… Geez, o-onii-san treats people so rudeeely."

Wiping the sweat dripping down her chin with the back of her hand and stating some rather harsh words, Meili's eyes had become bloodshot.

It was not as if she had established a direct link like that of Subaru's Cor Leonis with the Witchbeast, but to bend the atrocious Witchbeast's instinct as per her own notions, an immense strength of will was needed.

For Subaru, who had read her Book once and personally experienced half her lifetime, the weight of that indemnification was clearly known. That was precisely why, it had been transmitted to him.

——That Meili was seriously thinking of capturing the Tower, along with Subaru and the rest.

Subaru: "——Hk."

Meili: "Heeey, onii-san!? If you don't grab on properly you'll die, you knooow!"

Subaru: "I-I know…!"

The moment immediately after thinking deeply of those deep emotions, his body felt as if it was being carried away in the horizontal jolts and his posture crumbled. He had momentarily withstood his ground, but he was shouted at by Meili once she noticed that.

Whilst complying with those words, Subaru calmed down and clung to the protuberance of the large build.

——At present, the figures of Subaru and Meili were on top of the large build of the Sand Earthworm.

Meili: "If instructions were to be given directly from a close distance, there have to be children who listen to what's said even within children who cannot learn anything, isn't iiit."

Subaru: "Like I said, I never thought, I'd get to have a Witchbeast ride…!"

Swishing through the air, with his frame being jolted by the velocity of the Witchbeast's body cutting through the atmosphere with a roar, Subaru skillfully shifted his body weight whilst stuck in admiration of Meili, who was managing atop the Witchbeast's back.

This time as well, Meili's battle with the hordes of Witchbeasts commenced from the balcony of the Fourth Floor.

Making use of several Sand Earthworms which had been prepared in advance, having the hordes of Witchbeasts advancing towards the Watchtower suffer an attack in order to block the invasion of the Witchbeasts into the Tower, was Meili's role.

However, she quickly gave up on the attack from the balcony, jumping onto the back of the Sand Earthworm underneath and then, in one go, plunged the center of its forehead into the Witchbeasts with vigor like that of a massive wave.

Subaru's current status, was that he was accompanying Meili as bait in those heroic tactics.

Meili: "Really, the Witchbeast-chans all really love onii-san, isn't iiit."

Subaru: "And that's nothing to be happy about… Hk."

Looking at the excited state of the Witchbeasts drawing near, Meili sighed as they were crushed by the Sand Earthworm. While agreeing with her comment, Subaru narrowed his eyes at the hurriedly approaching hordes of Witchbeasts.

Though the principle behind it was unknown, it was something he was aware of in terms of the result.

The Witchbeasts who surrounded the Watchtower, strictly speaking, were not aiming for the Watchtower but had gathered, aiming for Subaru who was inside of it—— That was, evident from this situation as well.

The brunt of the Witchbeasts were concentrating on the extreme towards the Sand Earthworm, which was giving a ride to Meili and Subaru.

To turn their legs around, which were supposed to have been facing towards the Tower, and hastily make way towards this side with unraveled fangs, was merely the instinct of Witchbeasts trying to kill a living being, nothing more.

Subaru: "It wasn't as if I was half-convinced, but…"

Him having the physical constitution which attracted Witchbeasts was a peculiarity Subaru, who had been in present-day Japan until the previous day, did not even need confirmation for as a real feeling. In the

past, he had been bitten by a dog kept in his neighborhood; could that have possibly been an early-stage symptom of this physical constitution?

He was utterly unaware now. Though he was unaware——

Subaru: “Seems there’s no mistaking that I’m responsible for a majority of the five obstacles.”

The large hordes of Witchbeasts advancing towards the Watchtower, the Gluttonies’ having a go at approaching the Tower through Subaru’s Memories, Reid who would absorb Gluttony and acquire substance, Shaula who would start aiming for Subaru by the virtue of her transformation, the jet-black shadow which had swallowed the entirety of the Watchtower——

Looking at it back now, it was impossible to prevent the thought of the responsibility for their origin seemingly coming down onto Subaru in the truest sense. Of course, inevitability was no possible part of it.

Subaru: “My mind, is getting depressed…”

However, if the Witchbeasts, Shaula, and the jet-black shadow could be lured outside of the Watchtower, there may possibly form a way to break out of the deadlock of the present circumstances.

Subaru: “…It’s not forbidden to destroy the Examinations, huh.”

The fifth rule, behind capturing Pleiades Watchtower.

When he thought of the feelings of Shaula’s ■, who had hid that, he felt his chest ache but the rule he had finally fished out of her mouth granted a new viewpoint towards the place known as the Pleiades Watchtower.

It was not as if his eyes had been opened, granting him the power of innovation, by getting to know that rule.

However, granted with a scale he had never thought of, his way of looking at the world had expanded remarkably. Things which did not exist could not be obtained. That was, the fundamental law of the world.

To pass over the Examination without finishing it, to act contrary to the established routine of the Examination, those had been prohibited.

Without even getting involved in that, destroying the Examination itself had not been prohibited. Just what could that mean?

What could it——

Subaru: “Mei——”

Li, and as he tried to continue his words on, Subaru witnessed it.

By changing the course of the Sand Earthworm, whilst attempting to confirm whether the terrain of the Watchtower’s environs were usable or not, the objective came to a standstill.

Because an assailing corona, from overhead, had scattered away the thick trunk of the Sand Earthworm.

Earthworm: “————KRUAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!”

With more than eight meters blown off of the approximately ten-meter-wide waist, the Sand Earthworm shrieked, giving rise to its death wail.

The increasingly lower roar of the Witchbeast also resembled a howl, and Subaru, who had basked in that at close proximity, felt his vision dye white with its explosive intrusion into his eardrums.

The Witchbeast, having been subject to that, was disseminating bluish-purple bodily fluids, having failed to stop its body from getting blown off into a thousand scraps from both the front and back of its trunk. From atop its back, Subaru and Meili’s bodies were thrown down.

Subaru: “——Ah.”

Meili: “Guhk——!”

Instantaneously stretching out his hand, he took Meili’s petite body within his arms.

Patting his shoulder and trying to call out to him was a byproduct of it. By reflexively leaning his body forward, he had been able to catch her falling body.

However, that had not been a drastic settlement. The Sand Earthworm's large frame thrashed about violently, and not only Meili but Subaru too had been thrown off.

Even if he were to pull her in, in the end, they would fall on top of the sand, a place entirely surrounded by Witchbeasts.

Should that happen, the two of them would become feed for the Witchbeasts whilst they attempted to reorganize themselves. Above all——

Subaru: "——Shaula."

Clinging to the outer wall of the Tower with its tail stinger facing towards Subaru and Meili, the titanic scorpion—— Shaula, her large build mingling into the twilight, was visible in the distance, having made her appearance.

They were out of time.

Within the Tower, someone had broken the rules. In accordance with that, Shaula lost her self and transformed into the titanic scorpion and just as what she had reported about herself, she commenced attacking, aiming for Subaru.

That single shot had scattered the Sand Earthworm's trunk away, and midair, towards Subaru and Meili——

Meili: "Onii-sa…!"

Hugging Meili tightly, who was within his arms and had raised a voice like that of a scream, Subaru did not let his eyes avert from the titanic scorpion—— no, from Shaula. The red compound-eyes emitted a distinct glow within the presence of night, and upon its gaze being cast towards Subaru, from that line of sight, which did not betray any course of action, it was clearly understood that its aim was him.

Light gathered at the tail stinger, and now once again, a corona would be fired.

They would get vaporized should they be struck by that. However, they must not get struck by that.

He wished to avoid being killed by Shaula, regardless of how much that may abrade away his ■. If he were to bend away from that notion, he would surely become a miscreant then.

However, a way to defend themselves while they were midair existed.

Earthworm: “————KRUAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!”

The moment the corona was fired, the Sand Earthworm writhing in agony thrusted itself into the line of fire. Was that simply the instinctive movement of the Sand Earthworm or had Meili influenced it in some way, he did not know.

However, the single blast Shaula had fired had been avoided for the moment, when it was supposed to have vaporized Subaru away. And——

Subaru: “Gah, guh.”

With vehement vigor, Subaru and Meili fell head-first on top of the sand.

Meili, who was strongly embraced within Subaru’s arms, was perhaps safe. However, Subaru himself had not been safe. Unable to defend himself, he had gotten dispossessed of his head by the extensive sands.

A dull sound echoed, the joints of his bones, which he ought to avoid being smashed, had gotten broken.

At that instant, his field of vision was rendered completely black.

His nerves, which he ought to avoid being slashed, had gotten cut a thousand times.

Not only what was visible to his eyes, but sounds, sensations, anything and everything turned distant.

Merely his nose remained alive. It was baffling. The nose, which was not even expected to be capable of doing something useful normally. For some reason, till the very end of the end, he could sense scents.

The sweet, scent.

Within his arms, having been there till recently, that sweet scent.

Perhaps, yet remaining alive, that sce——

△▼△▼△▼△

Count 7.

- *Escaping outside of the Tower, has effectiveness in luring away the Witchbeasts.*
- *The Witchbeasts' aim is Subaru. The aim of the shadow and titanic scorpion as well, is perhaps the same.*
- *——With Natsuki Subaru alone, Meili cannot be protected.*

△▼△▼△▼△

Subaru: "Guh——"

Enduring the nausea welling up within him, Subaru glanced in front of him once again.

Stepping firmly, pouring immense strength in the legs, he somehow managed to have his body remain still. His anguish had not been eased. He was merely skillfully deceiving his anguish.

???: "Hiyah! Hiyayah! Eiyah!"

Crushing the bitterness of gastric juices with his teeth was Subaru, and in front of him, fiercely welding two ice swords, was Emilia. Evading those attacks of Emilia's calmly, with a deriding smile was the bitter enemy he was tired of looking at, Ley Batenkaitos.

Subaru: "————"

Since the restart point of Return by Death had been set up to the moment immediately following the confrontation with Louis Arneb in the Book of the Dead, Emilia and Gluttony's encounter was inevitable.

At the point in time Subaru had Returned by Death to, the battle between Emilia and Gluttony had already commenced.

The simple way to change situations was to tamper with the matchmaking. However, by activating Cor Leonis immediately after Returning by Death, Subaru was able to see the positions of his comrades within the Tower, and he naturally understood that this fight was unavoidable.

Henceforth, he did not have the situation of the tag team of Emilia and Ram fighting Ley change.

——However, something could be done about that in its own way.

Subaru: “——Julius!”

Julius: “I know!”

In response to Subaru’s sharp call, a single shadow stepped in.

That was, with a Knight’s sword in his grip and running through the frozen aisle, Julius. Having his light purple hair flutter in the icy wind he commenced his gallant piercing sprint from a lower posture.

Ley: “Haha! Even the nameless knight-sama shall be partaking in the baaattle!”

Julius: “Unfortunately, if that was intended to be a provocation then that is quite weak. Subaru pricks at spots much more painful.”

Ley: “Doing that despite being comrades, what’s up with that?”

Brushing away the advancing piercing bolt with his dagger, Ley and Julius exchanged words at close proximity. Even in the midst of that sword strikes unfolded between the two, and exchanges of special moves, conversation opposite to its content was being performed.

——Having Julius accompany them to this place, was a type of a gamble.

When the five obstacles had attacked the Watchtower for the first time, Subaru had Julius accompany them for going around this as well. At that time, Emilia had gotten her Name eaten and her cooperation with Julius, who had been rendered unknowing to her battle style, had been shoddy and lacked the ability to corner Gluttony. However——

Subaru: “This time, nobody has forgotten Emilia-chan. On top of that…”

Emilia and Julius’s coordination attempted to soundly counter Ley. At that point, ahead of Subaru’s line of sight, was the shadow of a person kicking the ceiling and making a sudden descent—— Ram cut in between them, sharply.

Of course, increasing her fighting strength through Cor Leonis was Subaru’s greatest duty. That had been applied this time as well, and Ram advanced closer to Ley’s torso with unordinary body handling. And,

Ram: “Just, kindly take the exit already.”

Ley: “Guh, eh.”

Cold words, and her palm, with equal sharpness, drove into Ley’s side. At the palm strike aiming to directly impact the internal organs through the gaps in ribs, a distinct rumble of pain spilled through Ley’s lips.

At the same pace, Ram’s knee tried assaulting the snapping body which then got blocked, but, grabbing the hair of her opponent from the back of his head, she slammed him onto the floor. On top of that, she consecutively swung down her heel into his face.

Merciless might, continuous attacks, those were the only way to drive Ley into certain defeat.

However, this had been far from being sufficient for damaging Ley. The heel Ram swung down onto his face, having grabbed that slender ankle whilst lying down, he glared at Ram from below with a bloodstained evil countenance.

Ley: “Nee-sama, gooot~…”

Emilia: “Hiryah!!”

Ley: “——Geh!?”

Ley expressed a smile on his evil countenance and his body was blown off by a horizontal attack—— by the ice hammer given shape to and swung by Emilia like a golf club.

It was a nice save, just when he was about to put his wickedness to work by grabbing Ram’s leg. At Ley, who went rolling and somersaulting adroitly, Emilia gallantly raised her eyebrows and puffed up her chest.

???: “…As merciless as always, I suppose.”

Beatrice, while supporting his body right by his side, whispered in response to those actions of Emilia’s with admiration, amazement, and a hint of pride.

The truth was, Subaru felt the same. She had a cute face, she could truly be relied upon.

Ram: “Emilia-sama, gratitude for the rescue.”

Emilia: “Mhm, it’s fine. Ram got grabbed because she’s moving around so much, after all. Julius as well, thank you for coming here.”

Julius: “Not at all, Gluttony is an opponent I am deeply connected to as well. Rather, my deepest apologies for exposing Emilia-sama and Miss Ram to danger. This was originally supposed to be a spot where I would tell you to kindly stand back, but…”

Ram: “With that as the opponent, there must be no room to be acting upon chivalry or gentlemanliness, isn’t it.”

Whilst hugging her elbows, Ram flatly intercepted Julius’s words. Even Julius could not refuse that. It seemed as if he felt ashamed of his feelings towards that itself.

There was a certain style to battle, there were certain rules to warriors.

However, adhering to that and becoming too obsessed over pride would result in large losses—— For Julius, this was a difficult spot. However, there was no choice for him but to respond to it.

At the very least, with the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, an atrocious gang as the enemy——

Ley: “…Ahhh, you sure are doing it. To do this much with us as the opponent is quite something.”

Saying that, the aforementioned Sin Archbishop stood up while shaking his head.

Whether that was him resounding having received Emilia’s heroic blow from his shoulder, his right arm was still hanging languidly. Possibly, bones of its shoulder had been fractured.

If that was true, then it could be said it was possibly fatal for Ley Batenkaitos’s Authority, that of reconstructing battle styles through Memories. No matter how proficient a battle style may be, it would be rendered meaningless if it were not exercised perfectly.

Subaru: “…Or instead, by substituting with your little sister, are you going to be switching your body and everything to someone else?”

Ley: “——Hahaan, we see, huh. That means, onii-san is aware of our Solar Eclipse and Lunar Eclipse. Well well, got seen through, isn’t it. But you knooow…”

Putting an abrupt halt to his words, Gluttony carefreely stuck his tongue out as if mocking Subaru and the rest. Though Subaru furrowed his eyebrows to that gesture, the answer was provided immediately. That was——

Ley: “——In such a disadvantageous situation, iiis there any meaning for us to still continue fighting?”

Subaru: “——Hk! Not good!”

It was self-evident logic; Subaru shouted while cursing the shallowness of his own thought.

Hearing that call of Subaru’s, Emilia and the others also seemed to have reach the same thought, but they were too late.

Ley: “Bahaahaiii~.”

With a light wave of his hand, Ley’s figure jumped over the space.

Using the odd talent of the Leaper, he erased his form from the aisle.

Julius: “Stay on the lookout for the surroundings! We do not know where he may appear from yet!”

Ram: “——It is futile. That bunch, once they are allowed to get away, they escape. That must be why, they have not been caught even once yet, isn’t it.”

Gluttony had rendered his form invisible, Julius had called for vigilance for a surprise attack, but Ram probed into the situation with composure while shaking her head left and right.

Subaru too, felt the same as Ram. Just as the words Ley had left, there lay not a single reason for him to continue fighting in such a disadvantageous situation.

Ley Batenkaitos, was a Sin Archbishop, not a warrior.

He did not possess the qualities of continuing to fight until the very end, or enjoying hard battles either. According to Louis's statement, what they desired was the greatest life, the itinerary of optimum solutions.

——The hazards of hard battles or defeat, those could not even be forgotten desires for them.

Emilia: "…Then, it's over already?"

Dumbfounded, Emilia whispered whilst reducing the ice hammer she held in her hand to air.

In those words was not the relief of the enemy having disappeared, but the disappointment having let a bitter enemy slip from their hands—— no, something differing furthermore, despondency.

The reply to that despondency, was——

Ram: "——Just a little bit more, and yet!"

Subaru: "————"

Ram: "Just, a single step more, and the lot who made Rem go through all that could have been…!"

Kneeling down, the one to raise that high-pitched voice had been Ram.

She struck her fist to the aisle's floor with power, her voice shaking regarding Gluttony, who had artfully succeeded in running away.

Everyone in this place was painfully aware, of the feelings of her regretful self.

The reason why Emilia had made her words ambiguous, why Julius hid his yellow eyes, why Beatrice, beside Subaru, lowered her shoulders, all of it boiled down to that.

They had come to possess a sudden clue.

However, unlike relying on knowledge of the Tower, enquiring Gluttony about the damage dealt by the Authority of Gluttony directly was a way that had been thought over with certainty.

To have that slip away from right in front of their eyes, it was obvious to feel despondency for that.

Subaru: "…With this, Ley's been repelled away, is that what it would mean?"

Understanding the feelings of Ram's ■ sinking deep into lamentation, Subaru possessed a different kind of doubt.

Seeing a three-on-one as a disadvantage, Ley had decided to withdraw from this spot. However, speaking in terms of whether he had withdrawn completely as a threat to the Watchtower, that was yet unclear.

Though Ram had informed Julius of the futility of looking out for a surprise attack, that was something limited to only this place. Within the Tower, the danger of Gluttony was wandering about, that situation yet remained unchanged.

If so, then it could not possibly be said that one of the five obstacles had been eliminated.

On the contrary, they had left an opponent about whom they had no idea where they may crash into at large, that was all there was to it.

Subaru: "——Hk, should the guy who escaped be pursued, or should another problem be looked after. At any rate, right now…"

???: "——The thing known as a situation's all 'bout the opponent, where ya should be movin' 'round without thinkin' anythin'."

Subaru: "————"

Suddenly, the moment he was giving consideration to the possibility of not making a move, he felt his hair rise at the voice which originated from behind. When everyone turned back instantly, slow footsteps approached from an end of the aisle.

Their owner was as if simply taking a walk without halting a single step, something the aforementioned bunch would not do.

For what reason?

???: "I'm takin' a walk 'round my garden, why'd I be worryin' 'bout other fellas?"

Boldly, without feeling shy for a single thing, the man—— Reid, had descended onto the Fourth Floor, and due to his figure, Subaru felt the situation deteriorate further.

Keeping the issue of Reid for later, he had hastened Ley Batenkaitos's subjugation, but in terms of results, Ley had escaped and obstructing Reid's revival had completely failed——

Emilia: "Since when, did this Tower become your garden?"

Reid: "Oioi, don't'cha go 'round havin' misunderstandin's, smokin' hottie. Lemme tell ya, when I said garden, I wasn't referin' to this gloomy Tower. Ya twat, ain't it obvious I'dbe callin' the whole damn world my garden."

Julius: "…If the man who became legend by a single swing of sword says that, then that comment must not be a trifling matter."

At the arrival of Reid, who was not supposed to be able to leave the Second Floor, Emilia and Julius spoke of their own respective astonishment and words. The response to that was extremely typical of Reid, that could be stated straightforwardly.

For this warrior who surpassed all human intellect, the idea of thinking over his footsteps—— no, not just footsteps. The thought of taking other people into consideration, was completely mismatched.

Ram: "——Why, have you descended down here? You were not supposed to be able to leave that floor, isn't that so, Examiner."

Reid: "Talkin' to women knelt down and sunken ain't to my likin'. If ya want me to answer, then try requestin'. I don't think strong-hearted women're bad. Though I don't think weak-hearted women're bad either."

Ram: "Is that so—— Such a sleazebag."

Without expecting a direct response, Ram promptly halted her response to Reid.

The next instant, Ram, who had kicked the floor with enough force to burst it open, rushed towards the opposing Reid in a straight line and, turning into a pink whirlwind, leapt towards the Sword Saint standing bolt upright.

At the same pace, making the best use of her petite build, a high-speed rotating kick was fired from her heel towards Reid's head. Without any exaggeration, a kick strike with enough force to cave his head in.

It was a stark kick which, were it to land a direct hit, would blow off his head physically. If not that, then at the very least, extinguish his consciousness.

Of course, the respective backfire would flow from Ram into Subaru, and ache like a strike of lightning running through his body.

Subaru: "Gih, guuuhk."

It was said that when an artery exploded, it ached to an inconceivable level. Right now, Subaru could boast that what was running through his entire body was something resembling that.

Ram's extreme attack which had been unleashed, the fruits it bore were——

Reid: "Not bad. But, that's all it's got. Had it been Trisha she would've broken the floor with a single blow, ya know."

Ram: "…Monster."

Reid: "Don't lump me together with somethin' like monsters. There's gotta be a limit to how low my worth can be, ya know."

Intercepting the kick of her leg, he had the impact flow into the ground.

He had witnessed that earlier, the cancellation of a physical attack—— that had made the floor and walls of the aisle develop cracks, however, the damage to Reid himself had been blocked perfectly.

And, towards Ram's abdomen, who had halted movement——

Reid: "Here, try endurin' this, ya twat."

Spinning and turning around his body once, Reid's bulky and sturdy leg sprang up. At the same pace, the sole of his foot captured Ram's body and swept it right upwards energetically.

Ram: "Kafuh."

With the air within her lungs squeezed out, Ram's lips, as she widened her eyes, vomited a large amount of blood out. Whilst bathing in that without evading it, Reid narrowed his eye unconcealed by the eyepatch and distorted his lips.

However, immediately opening up his narrowed eye again, a voice spilled out, "The hell?".

Ram: "It was successful, wasn't it."

At that instant Ram grasped the leg caved into her abdomen and using her entire body, settled the joint of her knee. With an attitude as if she were unaffected by the impact of the strike which had pierced through her abdomen. Seeing that, Reid carved a puzzled expression——

Reid: "——The hell. Ya're behind this too, aye, small fry."

Subaru: "————"

With a damp voice, he told Subaru, who gnashed his molars due to anguish like a bowling ball had been thrown into the pit of his stomach.

Emilia: "——Hk, no! Don't get any closer to Subaru!"

Immediately afterwards Emilia stepped ahead, upon observing hazardous emotions flash through Reid's blue eyes. However, upon her advance Reid swung his arm in annoyance, purloining the ice sword driven into him and struck Emilia's shoulder with its handle without mercy, then energetically kicked her as she fell.

Emilia: "Ahhk!"

Reid: "Ya're in the way."

Receiving the kick, Emilia was physically blown away. Much frighteningly, Reid did that with the leg whose knee was supposed to be captured in grip.

In other words, while still having Ram clinging onto his leg, he had kicked and sent Emilia flying. In the end, no matter how much strength Ram may pour in, it could not do anything to Reid's knee.

Ram: "Kgh, his limits know no end!"

Julius: “——Prepare yourself!”

Casting aside the advantage of having him in a lock, Ram rushed him, and Julius drew near him alongside.

However, the result of the attacks of the two was just as miserable.

His kick and his hand employed as a sword shot down Ram and Julius respectively, who were supposed to be at the pinnacle as warriors. Ram had her neck struck, Julius had his leg broken, all of them rendered incapable of standing.

Subaru: “——Shit.”

And, in the aisle where his comrades had fallen, Reid approached further, having literally eliminated the obstacles in his way. In front of his eyes was merely the groggy Subaru, who had taken up Emilia and others’ damage, and Beatrice, who had spread both of her arms wide as if shielding Subaru.

Subaru: “Bea… It’s no use…”

Beatrice: “It doesn’t matter if it’s no use or if it’s absurd, in fact. This is protecting the property that is Subaru… In this case, it is a special field of Betty’s, Subaru’s *aikata* as well, I suppose.”

Beatrice’s voice of acting strong, right now, echoed far too vainly.

Even when trying to respond to that strong spirit of Beatrice’s, Subaru’s hands, legs, made no reaction to the fighting spirit. What Subaru had taken up was only damage, which seemingly rendered the actions of his comrades futile.

Three of them were merely conscious, that was the fruit their willpower bore.

Beatrice: “Reid, why are you aiming for Betty and the others… For Subaru, in fact?”

Reid: “’Cause it’s in the middle of the Examination, sayin’ that’d be a pretty outdated response. My original plan aside, that actually goes for that pretty one…”

Beatrice: “So what, I suppose.”

Reid: “By meetin’ that one firsthand, my mind changed. He’s disgustin’, so I’ll erase him.”

A judgement grounded on peculiar sensitivity, conversation could not work against such an opponent.

At the same time, with the possibility of him flipping his view wiped out, Beatrice gnashed her pretty molars and glanced at Subaru lying behind, who had crumbled down and had been rendered immobile.

Beatrice: “————”

The reason why she took a tiny breath, was because she resolved her preparedness to fight and protect Subaru.

He wanted to tell her, to run away. However, what spilled out of Subaru’s lips was merely a hoarse breath.

Reid: “There ain’t any need for ya to go outta yer way and rush to yer death ya know, kid.”

Beatrice: “Unfortunately enough, living as if dead is utterly unwelcome at this point, in fact.”

Reid: “Huuuh, that so—— Then, there ain’t any choice.”

With his name bearing the expression of a hero and a legend, he would not hurt a girl child.

As if to say that such thoughts were as illusions, the glint in Reid’s eye remained firm. It seemed to be sentencing her, even if she, the one standing in his path, was naught but an infant.

Henceforth, without expecting any benevolence of ■, Beatrice was the first one to use all her might.

Beatrice: “Ul Minya.”

The emerging countless violet arrows submerged the aisle entirely, and completely blocked off any paths for Reid to escape through.

To fatally wound with the slightest contact was the special trait of Minya’s, fathoming that with a single glance, without flinching whatsoever, Reid curved his lips.

Beatrice: “Natsuki Subaru’s Great Spirit, Beatrice.”

Reid: “Good goin’—— Stick Swinger, Reid Astrea.”

With the mutual exchange of names, the atmosphere froze. Beatrice, with the violet crystals spread out in the air, and Reid, having picked up Julius's Knight's sword that had fallen at his feet, prepared themselves.

Subaru: "————"

Until the very end of the end, Subaru was unable to voice anything.

However, he kept his eyes open, he never closed them for even an instant.

His own decisions and choices, from the results they bore, he had been unable to avert his eyes.

He had been unable to avert them——

△▼△▼△▼△

Count 15.

- *Gluttony deserts, upon observing the situation to be visibly unfavorable.*
- *A neglected Reid ultimately comes to kill Subaru with absolute certainty.*
- *——Never again, will he let someone die before his own self.*

△▼△▼△▼△

Subaru: "Beatrice——!"

???: "Wah!? W-what happened, I suppose!? Subaru!? Subaru!?"

The moment he opened his eyes, he hugged the young girl before him without any forethought.

Astonished by the sudden action, the young girl—— Beatrice, stiffened her petite body.

It was his reunion with her, who had persisted with tragic preparedness until the previous moment. It turned into relief within his chest, along with unbearable guilt that breathed a painful wind into his ■.

Subaru: “Beatrice…”

He was grateful, he was able to meet her again.

Along with that, he felt apologetic for having her go through all of that.

Beatrice: “Subaru?”

Subaru: “——No, it’s nothing. I do remember. You’re Beatrice, I’m Natsuki Subaru. You and I, are each other’s *aikata*, now onwards too, please take care of me, please have fun with me, *choberigu*[236].”

Beatrice: “*C-choberiguh*, in fact…”

Beatrice, perplexed, raised her thumb at Subaru’s rhythmic words.

It was an expression that probably did not exist in this different world, so it had to be the result of Subaru poisoning her with it. Patting that head of hers, Subaru took in a deep inhale, and exhaled shortly.

Following that he switched gears in his consciousness, believing he must grasp the situation——

Beatrice: “Calm down, I suppose, Subaru.”

Subaru: “Huh?”

Beatrice: “Tell Betty what happened, properly, in fact. Did something happen inside the Book, I suppose? Were Reid’s memories displayed? Betty aside, what about Emilia and everyone? Confirm whether you remember them, in fact. Recall all things precious, properly, I suppose.”

Subaru: “T-that’s… Yeah, mhm, that’s right.”

Holding both of Subaru’s cheeks in her hands, Beatrice brought that to attention.

Hearing those words of hers, Subaru rued for his haste, having neglected the girl in front of his eyes. It was a phenomenon that would often happen in stories involving looping.

[236] Engrish flip. Means “very, very good” (チョベリグ), originally “ベリグ” (very good, albeit a bit truncated).

For an individual piling up loops, the fresh taste of a happening would eventually fade away.

With that, there would be a slip due to the experience points they had gained and the people for whom things would happen for the first time, and suddenly people would start to appear as not being people——

Subaru: "…I never thought, I'd be in that position."

In those kinds of works, the mind and body would fall into that state due to trials run tens, hundreds or times even more than that.

Compared to that, for Subaru it was—— merely, the fifteenth time.

To stop thinking of people as people in merely fifteen loops, perhaps it could be said his ■ was turning harsher.

Subaru: "Am I an idiot? No, I am definitely an idiot."

Casting away the weak, brittle, pathetic nature of his own ■, Subaru braced his mind.

He had only died fifteen times yet, that was all. Without having made any progress, he had merely exhausted his life in indolence. How come did his self hold any right to proclaim he was exhausted?

Such a thing did not exist for him. It did not.

Stand up, raise your face, clench your fists, Natsuki Subaru.

There's nobody else except you. Except you.

——Had it been "Natsuki Subaru", such failures never would have come to pass.

Beatrice: "——From the very beginning, Subaru has never been some Superman[237] capable of doing everything, in fact."

Subaru: "————"

[237] Once again, an Engrish expression from Beatrice. This one's impossible to flip, though, for obvious reasons.

Suddenly, Beatrice stated that toward Subaru, who had been repeatedly wondering to himself.

Subaru inhaled upon that comment and widened his eyes. Gazing into those black eyes of Subaru's straightforwardly, Beatrice shook her head left and right, conceiving grief in her blue eyes.

Beatrice: "It can be said countless times, I suppose. Subaru is no such Superman who can do anything, in fact. Always frantic about what lies in front, gets hurt for everyone's sake… even enduring pain isn't something he is good at, he's a normal boy, I suppose."

Subaru: "T-that's not, possible. That's not. After all, it should be that way…"

Beatrice: "It should be that way?"

Subaru: "It should be that way, only then can this…"

He firmly gripped to the pit of his stomach, gritting his molars, thinking back to the wounds of his arm, to the wounds all over his body, to his arms which had grown slightly sturdier, to everyone who relied upon Subaru, to Emilia, to Beatrice, to Ram, to Julius, to Echidna, to Meili, to Shaula.

His ■ was rumbling such that it was irritating.

More so than on the moment of being on the verge of Death, but perhaps Subaru's ■ was focused elsewhere else.

???: "So you have returned, Natsuki-kun… Did something happen?"

???: "Geez onii-saaan, just when I thought you've worried everyone, it's because of thaaat? No fighting with Beatrice-chan now onwaaards."

A dispute between Subaru and Beatrice—— no, it was nothing so stern.

However, looking at the two facing him, he saw that they were were Meili and Echidna, returning from their patrolling of the Library. Neither could he look at those two in the face.

"Anastasia": "Beatrice, did something happen to Natsuki-kun? Was the impact, indeed, too much?"

Beatrice: "…It's not as if that's not true, in fact. But, Betty and everyone else's consideration for Subaru, who had to experience that misery, were far too lacking, I suppose."

"Anastasia": "That is…"

Echidna furrowed her eyebrows at Beatrice, who turned her gaze downwards after staring at Subaru. However, she immediately nodded, as if having judged the circumstances,

"Anastasia": "Shaula, who rushed out, and Julius, who went after her, have not returned. I am also worried about Emilia-san and Ram-san who went to see Rem-san. I would like to join up with at least either of them, but…"

Beatrice: "…Echidna and Meili, head to the balcony, in fact. Betty will head to the Green Room and search for Emilia, I suppose. Stay adequately careful, in fact."

Meili: "That's okay buuut, what's onii-san going to dooo~?"

With Beatrice's brisk instructions, Echidna and Meili's lines of sight turned towards Subaru.

Towards those gazes, naturally, Subaru wanted to say he would accompany Beatrice but,

Beatrice: "——Subaru… will quietly stay here, I suppose."

Subaru: "Wha…! Don't say stupid stuff, Beatrice! I'm alright! My senses may certainly have dulled down after returning from the Book but, they'll immediately be in their place…!"

Informed by the standing Beatrice, Subaru reflexively snarled at those words. As he did, he poured strength into his legs in order to stand at the same level as them.

He poured strength into his legs, but——

Subaru: "——Ah?"

Beatrice: "Be in their place and, what then, in fact?"

Due to Beatrice's question, Subaru looked down onto his legs in astonishment. Even if he tried to pour strength somehow, especially into his knees, he was unable to retain balance.

No matter what he did, his posture crumbled, and he was unable to stand up.

Subaru: “Why…”

Beatrice: “It’s a matter of course, I suppose. Subaru is always working too hard, in fact.”

Subaru: “No, wait, please wait! Everything somehow working out when I’m in this state, that’s…”

Beatrice: “————”

Subaru: “That’s… not possible. I am…”

Shaking his head left and right in refusal, no matter how many times he tried, the result remained unchanged.

Even though he possessed no pain, no anguish, no fatigue, his will did not get conveyed to his limbs. And while he remained occupied with that, Beatrice ultimately took a single step in the direction of the staircase.

Beatrice: “——Subaru, Betty and the rest will cover whatever remains lacking, I suppose. That is why, you don’t have to think of doing anything and everything all alone, in fact. After all…”

Subaru: “Beatrice…”

Beatrice: “After all, that’s Natsuki Subaru’s style, I suppose.”

Leaving behind a smile for Subaru, who widened his eyes in astonishment, Beatrice dashed. As if matching her energy, Echidna and Meili also turned their backs towards Subaru,

“Anastasia”: “Natsuki-kun, I have expectations from you. That you still might be able to give one last push.”

Meili: “I think it’s fine if you reeest. But, it was onii-san who said some pretty grand stuff to me sooo, work hard on that a bit mooore.”

Saying all they had to say, the figures of the three disappeared from the Library, leaving Subaru behind, whom they had all spoken to.

If they were to take the staircase from the Third Floor, the three would encounter Julius, who would be making his way back at this time. Or perhaps at this rate, Julius would not come and drag Subaru out, that expectation as well he had embraced——

Subaru: “No way, he’d come… if Beatrice, says all that.”

He respected that.

Much less, the Subaru after returning from the Book of the Dead had been seen by the two of Echidna and Meili. There was no way their kind selves, would not relay that.

However, that solicitude came at the cost of life. Even though, he did not want to see someone among his comrades die before him.

Subaru: “All because, I’m so weak… Because I’m losing my spirit, and getting in this state, why.”

Had it been the true “Natsuki Subaru”, he must not have halted his feet by just this. His rage towards his own worthless self, gave rise to warmth in Subaru’s chest.

However, alongside that, a separate feeling was also gushing forth.

That was, the words Beatrice had left behind.

Beatrice: “——From the very beginning, Subaru has never been some Superman capable of doing everything, in fact.”

Beatrice: “It can be said countless times, I suppose. Subaru is no such Superman who can do anything, in fact. Always frantic about what lies in front, gets hurt for everyone’s sake… even enduring pain isn’t something he is good at, he’s a normal boy, I suppose.”

The image of the “Natsuki Subaru” was not present, as Beatrice had recited.

Despite hearing that, Subaru was unable to believe that. It was difficult to believe in. After all, in accordance with that, that would truly mean he was just a normal human, would it not?

Subaru: “Something, must have happened. That must have changed you, isn’t it, «Natsuki Subaru»…”

Something, like an extravagant meeting with someone.

Something, like attaining an unbelievable power.

Something, like experiencing something his current self could not even imagine.

Because something must have happened, which had allowed him to grow out of being the hopeless Natsuki Subaru, that "Natsuki Subaru" must have won the faith of everyone in his life in a different world.

Subaru: "It has to be like that…"

Without change, beating his trembling legs, Subaru rolled up the sleeves of his clothes. There, a black, ugly flesh mark, with its origins not within Subaru's memories was engraved as a pattern.

Was it possible to have experienced for themselves being burdened by that curse of sorts being etched upon one's body, and have their foundations remain unchanged? Such a thing was impossible.

That was why, "Natsuki Subaru" was——

Subaru: "«Natsuki Subaru», I summon you…"

Suddenly, what he had mouthed was the genesis of the suspicion he harbored for this world's "Natsuki Subaru".

The message for the existence absent here who had, upon times, been engraved upon his arm, upon times, been inscribed in a room as if it were a curse like a message from someone not present.

He found it to be as if it were hexing someone who had stolen away the role which originally belonged to himself.

Subaru: "If you really are within me, then… come out now…!"

Gripping his arms powerfully, with strength such that his bones would grate, Subaru called for "Natsuki Subaru" who was within—— no, who was not present here.

The existence who could achieve ideals which Subaru, who was present here, could never attain. He had requested “Natsuki Subaru” to come out, if he were truly present.

Subaru: “Come, come, come…! Show yourself, «Natsuki Subaru»!!”

His arms had been lacking, so he latched to his neck with his hands. Of course, the deed of strangling himself with his own hands was neither easy, nor could it be properly done.

In the first place, something as convenient as “Natsuki Subaru” showing his face when his life was in a predicament would never occur. Had that been the trigger, Subaru would have drawn him in close to twenty times now.

Just how many times “Natsuki Subaru” would have shown his face through that?

Subaru: “Shit, shit, shit…! I! I can’t, do it! You’re needed for this, «Natsuki Subaru»!”

Seizing the grasp on his trembling knees, Subaru powerfully struck the floor with his fist. Though his fist pained upon striking the floor of the Library of unknown material properties, it could not possibly equal the sense of hopelessness tormenting his chest.

He wanted to save them. He truly, wanted to save everyone.

Nobody was in the wrong. Nobody would mutually hurt each other. He knew that. He could believe, without any wavering, that he could save, that he could love everything.

Even though he wanted to save his everyone dear to him, he did not possess the power to save them.

Subaru: “Precisely now, is when you are needed, isn’t it… And yet, why is it me. My weak, cowardly self, cannot save them… And yet.”

Even now, his legs could not move.

Due to that, he had ended up sending Beatrice, Echidna, Meili, those who had not been here, Emilia, Ram, Julius, Shaula, to their demise.

Because Subaru had not been able to do anything, they, who had been destined to die, could not be saved.

Subaru: “…Cor Leonis.”

Whispering weakly, Subaru activated his own Authority, in order to be wounded.

The power of the Little King that dwelled within him immediately reported the positions of his comrades within the Tower. On top of that, the reality of them heading to face their own end, of the Tower heading to its demise.

Distant, currently in violent battle, was Emilia’s light. This time, Ram, who was supposed to stay by her side, her light was slightly a distance away—— from two separate lights, that of Patrasche and Rem. She was accompanying them.

In the balcony, Shaula was struggling fiercely, and perhaps Meili had joined her there. Julius and Echidna seemed to be moving together, and Beatrice, acting independently, was heading towards Emilia and the others; that was his comprehension.

The flow was precisely as per Beatrice’s instructions, and Subaru’s knowledge of the situation.

As things were, this loop was also heading towards failure——

Subaru: “——?”

With his mind directed by such negative thoughts, Subaru picked up a peculiar sense of incongruity.

Subaru turned his head towards his hind—— taking an extensive look of the enormous Library filled with countless Books of the Dead, Taygeta.

Subaru: “————”

It was an odd sensation.

Unmistakably, it was a sensation he was feeling for the first time. After all, ever since he grew conscious of his Authority of Cor Leonis, he had been activating it at this spot after Returning by Death.

Each time after that, Subaru headed for his comrades below, changing the cards he played repeatedly, running about for the sake of changing the situation, ultimately using and exhausting his own life.

That was why, activating the Authority in Taygeta was a matter-of-course to him.

However, after what Beatrice told him, he had stopped his feet here, a single step distant from the core, and getting to overlook the situations within the Tower; possibly, the origin of this.

Thanks to that, what could it be,

Subaru: "——This, response is…"

Faintly, he could feel it, so dim that it felt as if it was about to disappear.

It was distant from his comrades within the Tower, however, when compared to being felt with certainty, it was a fleeting, frail sensation—— but a sensation that was certainly present.

Pushing himself and having his trembling legs move, Subaru advanced tardily like a caterpillar. After that, he quickly had his body lean onto the bookshelf and elevated his upper body with all his might.

Somehow leaning his body weight on the bookshelf, he stood up. And he stretched his hand out to the frail light about to disappear, and grasped it.

That grasped light, a single Book of the Dead, drawing that out——

Subaru: "————"

He gulped down a single inhale.

A single book, with just the title upon its black binding, a book terribly dull and stale.

However, it possessed profound meaning for Subaru. Because——

Subaru: "——Natsuki Subaru[238]."

——Present there was, a Book of the Dead not supposed to be present.

[238] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "The Book of the Dead has Natsuki Subaru's name in Kanji (菜月・昴) instead of its usual Katakana writing (ナツキ・スバル)". I'll add that, when Subaru woke up after the amnesia, his name was also written in Kanji for a while, and when his mom and dad refer to him in the Arc 4 Trial, they usually do so via the Kanji writing. There may be some significance there.

Arc 6 Chapter 73 – “Natsuki Subaru”

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 2 “Natsuki Subaru”, Parts 1-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——With the Book of the Dead which had “Natsuki Subaru” inscribed on it in his hands, he stood still.

Subaru: “————”

Widening his dark eyes in astonishment, Subaru felt his throat rapidly becoming parched.

Modest expressions such as astonishing or stupefying would be far too lacking. What had struck Subaru at that moment was something much more serious, something as if numbing harm.

A lethal toxic which would wield affect only when used on Subaru, and nobody else——

The Book of the Dead of “Natsuki Subaru”, was piercing through Subaru whilst commanding such powerful connotation.

Subaru: “Wh, y…”

A Book of the Dead that was not supposed to exist, was present here.

What was supposed to be present in the Third Floor of Pleiades Watchtower, Taygeta, were the Books of the Dead recording the lives of the departed. Having the Book of a living being was contradictory.

Or perhaps, could this mean he simply, by chance, had found the Book of a human with the same name and surname?

Subaru: “That would have actually been convincing, had this not been a different world…”

The possibility that rose to the surface in his mind, was instantly repudiated.

Though it was a matter of course, this place was a different world—— in this place, where even the rules of naming would be vastly different from what Subaru was aware of, why would a name like "Natsuki Subaru" manifest in this place?

Even before that, there lay a decisive issue.

The title of "Natsuki Subaru's" Book, had been written in Kanji.

Subaru: "————"

From what all Subaru had witnessed till now, even the characters were different in this different world. That was why, even if someone else aside from Subaru who did not know of his world's characters, were to see it, they would probably perceive this title as if being hieroglyphic characters or something of that sort.

If that were to be considered, the unbelievable chances of Subaru finding the Book of the Dead of "Natsuki Subaru" here through sheer luck were——

Subaru: "——It's predetermined and established, whom this belongs to."

He could only think of that being true.

Subaru: "————"

Once again, with the Book of the Dead in his hands, Subaru silenced himself and pondered.

The reason why Subaru had happened upon this Book of the Dead, was because he had depended upon the dim response he had spied out through Cor Leonis.

This had not been the first or second time he had searched for a Book in the Library, though Subaru was mindful of it, discovering the Book being aimed for in this enormous archive was a deed next to impossible to achieve.

Perhaps, the kind unattainable lest God's unseen hand were put to work.

Subaru: "Or perhaps, not God, but someone's…"

Subaru held conviction, in that particular speculation.

The rest lay, in the authenticity of this Book of the Dead—— in whether what was depicted here was truly the life of "Natsuki Subaru" or not. If it truly were depicted, then what sort of trick was behind it.

As the solemn truth, Subaru was here, alive.

If the Book of the Dead of this Subaru was truly here, then——

Subaru: "Am I being treated as deceased, ever since I lost my memories… The Books of the Dead of Taygeta, that Hall of Memories, is even observing the worlds I die in…?"

If that were the case, then in no way was it inconceivable that it was depicting Subaru's Deaths in some type of form through the Book of the Dead. However, in that case, what did that make of Return by Death?

Subaru: "Whether it rewinds time, or does it rebuild the world itself, I'd given a thought to both but…"

For argument's sake, along the hypothesis that the Books of the Dead held a method to generate the Book of "Natsuki Subaru", it could not be helped but to reach the conviction that the latter had much more likelihood. If that held true, then the phenomenon which encased this Natsuki Subaru was not something as charming as Return by Death, but——

Subaru: "Am I an idiot? No, I am definitely an idiot… Damn coward."

Sensing his contemplation disarray into a slant, Subaru abused himself.

Why his thoughts had gone astray, he understood the reason for that by immediately noticing his own cowardice—— He was merely, frightened of the Book of the Dead.

What would happen once he read the Book of "Natsuki Subaru"?

He was frightened of that happening, whose course was completely unfathomable. Henceforth, pursuing the hypothesis lacking all foundation, he was trying to delay it and keep delaying it.

Delaying, opening the first page of the Book within his hands.

Subaru: "————"

Though it was not a hypothesis which had come into being merely five minutes prior or anything, the fact that the Book of the Dead of "Natsuki Subaru" was present here was strange. But for Subaru, it was also salvation.

He considered it evidence, that Subaru had not popped up into being at this place, at this moment.

However, along with that, it also held the meaning that a "Natsuki Subaru" other than himself, had certainly existed and had walked his own path in this different world, and also that Subaru was trampling upon those footsteps from above, laying waste to them, layering paint over them.

That was why, all that was left was to gain confirmation.

Subaru: "First of all, as the Book of the Dead of «Natsuki Subaru»… Where does this thing start from, and where does it end at?"

In Meili's instance, it had been precisely from her infancy onwards—— ever since she gained awareness of ■, ever since her memories had been established as memories, and it had been possible to follow her since her youth.

However, how would things unfold in Subaru's case? ——Having been able to read the Book of the Dead, would it originate the sprouting of a self-consciousness similarly to how it had happened with Meili, growing over time, and ultimately, where would it lead to?

If "Natsuki Subaru" was being counted as deceased, rather than the presently-amnesiac Natsuki Subaru following "Natsuki Subaru's" memories up until the moment immediately preceding the loss of memories, would be natural, or perhaps not.

Instead, perhaps it would trace the memories of the present Subaru, who had lost his memories, up until he had awakened inside the Tower. In that scenario, which Death would it choose for the end?

Otherwise, as Reid's Book of the Dead, what would merely be present would be a wreckage of memories turned void.

Just as the memories of Reid, which had been recorded in the Book of the Dead, had disappeared from within the Book in order to reconstruct him as the Examiner of this Tower, the memories of "Natsuki Subaru" had also possibly disappeared.

That was why, what would be visible after opening this Book would not be the memories of "Natsuki Subaru", but——

Subaru: "——In the end, what do you want to do, cowardly bastard."

Did he desire to see it, did he desire not to see it.

Disdaining his own self, who had been unable to easily respond to that, reprimanding the fearfully curled up ■, he exhaled.

After coming this far, it was inconceivable to opt for not seeing it. Even if it had risen to the surface as an option, he could not even envisage the lunacy of choosing it.

That was why, that was why, that was why, that was why, that was why——

And then, and then, and then, and then, and then——

Subaru: "——Hk."

Taking a powerful breath in, he opened, the Book of the Dead.

And, the journey of "Natsuki Subaru", of an unknown origin and an unknown termination——

△▼△▼△▼△

——*This is seriously bad.*

Tasting a solid sensation on his face, his brain was being scorched by the flaming heat in his abdomen.

Violent fever which restricted even his breathing, his head felt hot as if magma had been poured into his blood vessels. Yet his limbs turned colder and heavier, the inconsistent sensations jolting his existence down to the very soul itself.

His thoughts screamed about what had occurred. His thoughts screamed that he must do something.

With those flowing in and intertwining, he gave rise to a screech.

However, his consciousness, which was screaming he must do something, proved to be futile.

The moment he moved his hands in an attempt to break out of the deadlock, and touched his guts, which were the origin of the scorching heat, his palm was drenched wet with thick blood, and he understood that further blood also had the floor drenched.

——Ah, is all of this, my blood.

Though he was unaware of the amount of blood that had flowed on and inundated the floor, the bleeding had not been to the level of one donating blood. The source of his life streaming out, did not put a halt to the fragile lamp of life.

In short, his flesh body had already commenced the countdown towards death.

Even still, the reason why ■ had not died yet, was because for this life of his, which was heading towards its death, there yet remained a mission to fulfill.

——He had, to raise his voice.

He must raise his voice.

Watch out. It's dangerous. Don't come here. Run. Without turning back even once, run at full speed.

And, he must inform about the hazard.

He must convey it to her, inform her about danger, so that she would not enter this place. And yet——

Subaru: "————"

He was unable to raise his voice.

What came out instead, was a nauseating, warm, blood clot. With his throat clogged by that, he was rendered incapable of bringing out even a single uncouth word. Violently coughing, the scorching heat in his abdomen expanded.

Ache and agony, misery and disorder, and——

???: "——Baru?"

A voice with a tone of a silver bell, eventually took a step into the space it must not enter.

Subaru: "————"

He had to stop that, no matter what.

And yet, he did not make it.

Though he had to do that even if it meant the loss of his life, just because his guts had been rent.

???: "——Hk!"

A scream echoed, and someone collapsed down onto the floor along with a violent report.

The hand of that fallen someone, overlapping with the hand of his fallen self, was an offensive prank on part of a far too ironic fate. In all ways, the wickedness of the one known as fate was far too onerous to describe with words.

Subaru: "————"

Those weakly trembling fingers, softly grasped that overlapping hand. Grasping back that sensation of fingers, as if they were clinging and relying upon, Subaru took a deep, deep inhale, that clump of blood accompanying it.

Subaru: "…ait."

A clot of blood escaped him, his life seeped, streamed away. He could not stop that outward flow of blood.

No longer, could he do anything. This situation, had reached its absolute limits.

All due to a single powerless, incompetent man, everything was going to start afresh.

That was why, his vow dyed with this blood, wielded no significance.

Even though he knew nothing could be done, his idiocy yet commanded him to vow.

Even though he knew it was over.

Even though he knew it would be over.

As if those were not coming to an end, disgracefully, he vowed.

Subaru: "I, no matter what——"

——*Will save you.*

At the next instant, he—— Natsuki Subaru "Natsuki Subaru" / "Natsuki Subaru"[239] lost his life.

△▼△▼△▼△

The moment the connection was severed, Subaru sensed firm pain at the back of his head.

Subaru: "Gahk——!!"

The impact reverberating in his skull, he hallucinated as if he had been suddenly struck from behind, but he immediately understood that he was mistaken. Because, Subaru's body had collapsed right towards his back, and he could feel the entirety of his back make contact with the chilling floor.

Subaru: "This, place is…"

Not in the icy, dim, and somewhat dirty building, but he was in the Library of Taygeta.

Slowly pouring energy back into his body, turning about his dumbfounded head, Subaru turned his neck around—— and then, touched his own guts with great perplexity.

There supposed to be present, was the wound which would diminish his life. However——

[239] The line here uses all three ways we've seen Subaru's name being written, Katakana without quotation marks (ナツキ・スバル), Katakana with quotation marks (『ナツキ・スバル』), and Kanji with quotation marks (『菜月・昴』).

Subaru: "Not, there… Not there, not there, the wound isn't, there. The slash, in the guts, isn't there… Hk."

Touching his guts countless times, he confirmed the disappearance of the origin of scorching heat. Within the spectacle he had witnessed immediately previously, that utmost vivid sensation was vanishing.

He had heard that the brain hallucinated ache far too intense as a "fever". A phenomenon identical to what had occurred. In other words——

Subaru: "——A memory, of having guts be slashed open, and dying."

The end of having one's guts cut open by a sharp-edged tool, drowning in a foam of blood with a sense of powerlessness, and dying.

Finally, if he himself had been the only one to die by that, it was still excusable. However, that was not how it had been.

Subaru: "Satella…"

What he whispered, was the name of the girl he had been unable to save at the very end of the end—— her alias.

Within that memory, the silver-haired young girl he recognized had fabricated her name and come in contact with Subaru. What had been the reason behind that? Though it was evident no evil intent had been the reason for it.

Subaru: "…Still, dying such an uncouth way."

Putting his hand on his forehead, Subaru ruminated on what had occurred to his own body.

Being summoned to a different world, wandering aimlessly in the town with foolish positivity, picking up a quarrel with delinquents and almost dying, saved by Satella from that, and assisting her in her search for what she was looking for——

Subaru: "Completely useless…"

At the final moment, without even conveying the crisis he was supposed to convey, he had ended up having her get involved as well.

Not just dying wastefully, the word "vain" in the expression "dying in vain" could not even make for an excuse.

The life of Natsuki Subaru—— of "Natsuki Subaru", could never compensate for it.

Subaru: "But…"

It was not as if he had gained absolutely nothing from it.

Subaru: "——This was, the Book of the Dead of «Natsuki Subaru»."

That alone was the certain, absolute, unquestionable truth.

Subaru: "————"

Hopeless, foolish, weak, irredeemable "Natsuki Subaru".

He continued to enlarge his absurd self-consciousness, overlapping with that, averted his eyes away from his lack of filial piety. And finally, using being summoned into the different world as a convenient means of escaping, and by exhibiting pessimistic positivity, he became a swindler trying to deceive himself, those around him, anything and everything.

The result of that idiocy, had tied together with the tragedy in that loot house.

What a pretentious, naive, and foolish failure had it been.

How come, he had been able to stay defenseless at that hazardous place? What had given his idiotic self such baseless confidence? Like that, it would not be odd for him to get killed overseas, let alone in a different world. That lack of vigilance was to blame. The result of it all, must be that.

It had been so unsightly, such that he would have wanted to kill himself had he survived.

Subaru: "That hopeless, idiotic bastard… But."

Evidently, it had been fatal foolishness, but it was fortuitous to have it affirmed.

Putting a check on his rage, enduring it, he scrutinized that truth closely.

The Book of the Dead was certainly functioning. That Book had recorded the death of "Natsuki Subaru". And, it thrust a great number of truths, which were a matter-of-course for "Natsuki Subaru", at Natsuki Subaru, for whom there was no way to know them.

——To name it specifically, it was the sequence of events of obtaining the power of Return by Death.

As per convention, an existence who was God, or wielded similar strength, normally in a transcendental state of being, had summoned Subaru to the different world.

However, for that "Natsuki Subaru", if he were to not have the memories of being summoned by such a transcendental being, there would be no occasion where he would get to know whom he got the power granted to him from, and how he had grown conscious of that power.

That was something Subaru could affirm, who had seen the end of that "Natsuki Subaru" for himself.

At the very end of the end, though he had been blabbering things without knowing when to give up, at that moment, "Natsuki Subaru" supposedly did not possess any confirmation that he would overcome death, and rewind time.

At the very least, he himself had been like that—— Thinking that far, he abruptly noticed.

That he, and "Natsuki Subaru", had not been able to see things from an objective point of view very well.

The reason for that was evident.

Subaru: "It's diving more deeply than on, Meili's instance…"

When he had read Meili's Book of the Dead, and personally experienced her life, he had tasted the sensation of having his mind undergo influence quite severely as well. Melting halfway with her personality, Meili had appeared within his mind as a symptom of hallucination, such that she had been able to say all what she wished, toying Subaru around.

Above all, that had ultimately been a Meili fabricated by Subaru's consciousness, an illusion brought forth by chaos utterly unrelated to the real Meili, of that he was aware.

Subaru: "————"

However, this instance's Book of the Dead demarcated a line between itself and Meili's experience.

All things said and done, in the chaos immediately after reading Meili's Book, still present were clues to differentiate between himself and her. The difference in gender, the difference in age, the difference in values, there were plenty.

Detaching himself from her through those clues, even if slightly, made it possible him to comprehend that she was an entirely different existence.

However, that was not how it was this time.

None other than he himself was the party concerned. His self who was not himself, a situation which normally would not manifest, it laid expectation upon Natsuki Subaru, and pushed him into his fight with himself.

A fight with oneself—— Judging by mere words, not many expression more cliché than this, but they were words which evidently and straightforwardly denoted the situation which Subaru had been placed in at present.

The truth was, he possessed a negative outlook.

Overlapping with his own self, rather meant an act of painting his self out. The water washed by the dark paint called "Natsuki Subaru", dyed him as if with a paintbrush that had been dipped in that.

Subaru: "——Emilia. Emilia, Emilia, Emilia, Emilia, Emilia."

At the sensation of feeling himself be painted out, Subaru called Emilia's name, as if it were some magic.

The reason why he chanted Emilia was evident. The "Natsuki Subaru" inside the Book of the Dead, did not recognize her as Emilia.

Trusting the alias he had been told, he saw through his duties as a clown until the very end of the end.

Therefore, that was the difference between the present Subaru, and "Natsuki Subaru".

Subaru: "————"

With the roots of his teeth quivering, fearing the sensation of his self being whittled, Subaru looked at his feet. The single Book he had dropped thoughtlessly, that had fallen there.

Subaru: "————"

Once now, he had observed up until "Natsuki Subaru's" time of death.

Thinking about it now, mysteriously enough, the Book of the Dead had commenced with the moment he had arrived into the different world, from the point he had shouted out the change of worlds with a foolishly bare expression. Even though for Meili's instance, it had commenced at the point in time she had acquainted proper awareness of ■—— No, for now, all that was of no significance.

The problem was, the continuation to that Book of the Dead.

Subaru: "You must be thinking, the same, «Natsuki Subaru»…"

Thanks to the Book of the Dead, he had been able to witness what was perhaps the Death of "Natsuki Subaru" when he was first summoned into the different world for himself.

However, that was merely the beginning.

That "Natsuki Subaru", must have also utilized the power of Return by Death.

Otherwise, that could possibly have been a power which had manifested not in the form of Return by Death, but something wholly different—— No, that would be a more natural way.

Rewinding time at will was much more convincing.

For "Natsuki Subaru", who had met Emilia, Beatrice, Ram, Echidna, Julius, Meili, Shaula, Patrasche, Gian, and many others, who expected him to play an active role, something like that was much more suitable. In that case——

Subaru: "That must be there, ahead of this…"

"Natsuki Subaru", who seemed to be no different from Natsuki Subaru.

However, something decisive which had caused that "Natsuki Subaru" to become "Natsuki Subaru" did exist. Seeking that, Subaru, at once, held the Book in his hands.

And, closing his eyes, took deep breaths.

Subaru: "————"

With the Book in his hands, Subaru counted the beating of his chest. And while calming his ■ down, he slowly commenced walking.

A slow gait, however, straightforward, lacking all faltering.

Before long, where Subaru had reached was in front of the bookshelf, and as he stretched his hand out——

Subaru: "——Second Book."

The single Book following "Natsuki Subaru", made a weak assertion of itself through Cor Leonis.

△▼△▼△▼△

——The progress "Natsuki Subaru" made was unsightly, haphazard, irredeemable.

???: "Completely useless. A novice in appearance, with crude movements. With neither Divine Protections nor any skills, I'd imagined that there'd be some instinct or intelligence at least, but not even that. I wonder, why do you even try?"

Tormented by a self-indulging mighty enemy, he was minced without being able to even launch a proper counterattack.

And in the environs of his wounded self, was a bloodstained old man and a golden-haired girl, collapsed. Neither of them could be saved. He could not even move.

???: "Slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, agonize."

Before long, with his guts sliced, with his eyes sliced, within a world in which he lost his eyesight, with a time limit running against his life, he lived the time until his death nestling close in dread.

Until the very end of the end, all whilst fearing, shivering, dreading, disgracefully——

△▼△▼△▼△

???: "Oi, did you get stabbed?"

???: "It can't be helped, yeah? Let's try running there. It shouldn't be nothing so diffecult."

???: "Ahhh~, this won't do. He'll die from the injuries to his guts… His clothes are all a mess as well."

Just how careless could you be, to talk where your fallen opponent is?

He must use his brain for such worthless thoughts, otherwise he would be rendered unable to comprehend the shocking pain piercing through his back.

A technique to escape pain, or a method to protect himself, to have possession of them would have astonished him to the bottom of his ■.

He was unable to save himself, from the truly futile, vain death.

Calling the girl Satella although she was not Satella, having to hear harsh words from her due to that, unable to sense the strikingly obvious situation, and being killed by someone who looked down on him and had not thought of killing him.

A suitable end. Why, from the beginning to the end, could he not live without regrets even for a second, even for a minute?

Enough. This world is going to end. I know it.

Because from the very beginning, I have known, and been able to see Death, and so I came here. That is why, given nothing decisive is present, it's the end of this world. As it's the end, as it's the end, I'll go to the next one. Go to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next, to the next. Otherwise, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts and it hurts and it's painful and it's unbearably hurtful but something must be carried on to the next——

△▼△▼△▼△

The demise that was brought to him whilst he was asleep, contrary to a swift and easy end, was accompanied with mercilessness as if chilling venom had been poured into his blood vessels.

The arrival of the Death whereby he could not even comprehend he had died, compared to the Deaths till now, in which he was unable to detach pain and suffering from himself, was perhaps the easiest one. That was what he had believed.

However, in no way was that true.

Why, had he died? First of all, had he really died?

Within humans fearful of Death, the wish to die as if sleeping is substantially present, but if Subaru, who had experienced that, were to be asked, then he would respond that it was not worth wishing for.

In Death, there lies the meaning of Death.

In the demise, denouement of life, something which was learnt from it must be attached to the end.

Within chaos and despair, fright and yearning, Subaru sought the subsequent Book of the Dead. He must unravel what had occurred. He must unravel, what had killed his self——

△▼△▼△▼△

——Mysteries invited further mysteries, as incomprehensible and irrational Deaths followed him.

Overlapping ends, continuously repeating tragedies.

Though he had refused dying as if sleeping, dying as if being shattered, as if being gouged out, were indeed not pleasant either.

From next to next, his life was aimed for, robbed, shattered, and finally, betrayed.

Why, was no longer the question for that.

Why, had he had to save the blue-haired girl, who had killed his self?

Why, had his self become so frantic in order to save her, why, had she give such a powerful push to Subaru's back, who was crushed and knelt down?

Why, had he gained strength by her words, gained resolve to move forward?

Ahead of betrayal, he earnestly yearned.

For the desire which had actually not been betrayed, for the world which affirmed that it was correct.

"Natsuki Subaru", offered his life as indemnification for the sake of the fruitless, sorrowful misunderstanding of saving someone, and prized it open through sheer strength.

Meeting Emilia, meeting Puck, meeting Felt, meeting Old Man Rom, meeting Reinhard, meeting Elsa, meeting Beatrice, meeting Ram, meeting Rem, meeting Roswaal, meeting Petra, meeting the residents of Arlam Village——

——No matter what, he would thrust refusal at any muddy stream that may advance upon them, was what he had believed.

△▼△▼△▼△

Subaru: "Ugh, buh…!"

Putting a check on his lips, facing assailing death once again, Subaru knelt down in the Library of Taygeta. Without supporting his body, he collapsed onto the bare ground as if falling.

Subaru: "Haa, haa…"

His breath was rough, what drenched the entirety of his body was abundant cold sweat.

Whether it was hot, whether it was cold, whether it was bitter, whether it was sweet, whether it was agonizing, whether it was pleasant, his feelings were blended into a heterogeneous mixture of likes and dislikes, black and white, and he was unable to comprehend the correct answer.

It felt as if he was being struck from all angles and directions ceaselessly, from next to next.

Subaru: "——With this, eight Books."

Discovering the Books of the Dead of "Natsuki Subaru", and ever since he commenced reading them, he was merely piling up the number of books.

Saying "number of books" was something odd in itself as well. Not that the numbering kept on ascending; to have the "next book of the same series" for a book present in this Library was not how it was supposed to be originally.

Yet, the number of Books of "Natsuki Subaru" kept on incrementing, continuously.

Adding to the mystery, the mechanism of not being able to find the next Book of "Natsuki Subaru" unless a Book of "Natsuki Subaru" was read—— this cycle progressed via an order.

Without skipping a single Death for the purpose of an interval, he followed the footsteps of "Natsuki Subaru".

And, whilst following the footsteps, he thought.

About how tactlessly frank, incorrigible, immature "Natsuki Subaru" was.

Particularly the last Book, observing the fate of the eighth Book of the Dead, it was impossible to not feel that way.

"Natsuki Subaru", immediately after the announcement of the Royal Selection, fractured his relationship with Emilia, and ultimately hurt her ■ simply merely because he could, without any apology or retrospection, then died in utter confusion.

He who was reading the Books, felt depressed, his consciousness equivalent with the ego of the one in the Book of the Dead.

Merely the people concerned were supposed to experience that effect in particular, but it was still difficult to tolerate.

A he, who wondered why did he not understand, existed.

On the other hand, a he, who wondered why would he lament not understanding, existed as well.

Subaru: "Don't be trapped, in the past…"

It was a tragedy he had witnessed with these eyes an instant ago. Hence why his body ached as if being torn off.

However, that was the past. It was just, a happening that had occurred in the past.

Even if it were a happening right in front of "Natsuki Subaru's" eyes, who had faced Death at that instant.

Even if it were a happening right in front of Subaru's eyes, who was in agreement with "Natsuki Subaru", who had faced that instant.

That was the past. A past that persisted, for having turning into a wound difficult to forget.

That was why, at the present instant, he would take a breather and leave the shock behind. He would leave it. That someone had killed Emilia. That someone had committed that terrible spectacle in the village.

If not, then ■ would get shattered.

What would he do, should Subaru's ■ shatter here, rendered unable to stand up.

How would someone, do something? "Natsuki Subaru" was not present here. That was why, there was no other choice but for Subaru to somehow manage through.

Subaru: "Still…"

——Haven't found it.

Subaru: "————"

There was supposed to be something decisive, bestowed only upon "Natsuki Subaru".

It would be the key to make the precise distinction between Natsuki Subaru, and "Natsuki Subaru". At the very least, until that key was procured, this voyage of going through Books of the Dead would not terminate.

The decisive key, which made Natsuki Subaru grow wings and attain flight, as "Natsuki Subaru".

The key which had changed him into the savior who could catch Emilia, Beatrice, Rem, Ram, Echidna, Julius, Meili, Shaula, Patrasche, Gian, from falling.

At the current instant, there were no signs of it.

"Natsuki Subaru" could not possibly possess the mettle, the magnanimity, to be a savior or a hero, to be able to fulfill the immense duty of saving someone.

What he possessed was merely his stand-out stubbornness, and the good fortune of being blessed by the people around him.

However, that was not all.

It was not that formless "something".

He possessed the omnipotent key, something which was further apparent, evident, which could be recognized at a single glance, which convinced everyone that he had the ability because he possessed it.

He possessed it. That was why, in search of that——

Subaru: "——Number, nine."

Once again he tackled the samsara of Death, whirling with mayhem and chaos, betrayal and despair.

My wish, "Natsuki Subaru". To turn into you, as fast as possible.

——Before I am no longer able to bear with your footsteps, your wounds, your Deaths, in my ■.

△▼△▼△▼△

——Deaths, were accumulated relentlessly.

——Ends, were relentlessly accumulated.

Each time he felt ache, each time he was in agony, each time he lost something, each time he was robbed of something, he heard the sound of ■ cracking.

Crying and screaming why and how, gritting his molars thinking it would end there, standing up whilst vomiting blood, sheathed in wounds, he advanced.

The struggle of an uncouth man risking his life, was present there.

Not once but twice, not twice but thrice, not thrice but four times and so forth, getting cornered by situations and expiring, yet, he held his ground in order to smash through the lock of turmoil.

That was amazing. Plenty amazing. Truly worthy of respect.

To not give up, that was something quite amazing. Even after experiencing so much, gritting teeth so much, and still fight to the bitter end was amazing. Truly admirable. His opinion had improved—— But, that was not it.

But, that was not it. That was not it. That was not it. That was not it indeed.

Subaru: "Something…!"

——*"Something" had supposedly happened, didn't it?*

"Something" had to have happened. Otherwise, it would not make sense. Otherwise, things would not hold true.

"Something" had happened, which had turned the impotent, irremediable Natsuki Subaru develop wings, attain flight and turn into "Natsuki Subaru", who could save everyone, someone, Emilia and the others, that was how it was supposed to be.

That was why, he was searching for it, dying, losing sanity, with bloodshot eyes.

Upon each instance of reading the Books of the Dead, personally experiencing the impact, terror, and the agony of Death which "Natsuki Subaru" had to taste by trifling with the different situations, he grew further desperate and pursued his search.

Yet, he was unable to find a single clue——

Subaru: "Uh, AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH——!!"

He struck his head onto the floor.

He had been alright while witnessing it. However, the instant he returned, his ■ was fomented with disgrace.

Subaru: "Dad… Mom…!"

Present there had been "Natsuki Subaru", who had exchanged words with his father and mother, and apologized to the two of them.

Present there had been "Natsuki Subaru", who had been thrown into a different world, and who, for the sake of residing in this place, had bid farewell to those two.

Even after carelessly forgetting all that his self had committed, knowing that his parents would be saddened as a fact, he conveyed words of love for self-satisfaction——

Subaru: "Ugh, buh, eghhhhhhhh…"

He vomited. His tears, overflowing.

What was hurtful, what was excruciating, was that he was painfully aware of the feelings of "Natsuki Subaru", and the fact that Subaru had also gotten to know, that his parents had forgiven it.

Please don't forgive him. Please curse him. I wish his parents would speak ill of him, call him out for lacking filial piety.

However, they did not act that way.

Neither his father nor his mother, were as Subaru had wished. In order to console himself, he wished his parents to call him a petty human or things similar. He had been unable to achieve that.

Subaru's father, Kenichi. Subaru's mother, Naoko—— They were the greatest couple of parents.

There was his self who was happy for that, there was his self who approved of the judgement "Natsuki Subaru" had been bestowed with despite lacking all rights to be saved, there was his self, who was going to be saved, making his ■ unsightly.

——This. Is this the cause? With this as the reason, did he turn into "Natsuki Subaru"?

Subaru: "No… no, no, no! That's not it! Not something like, this!"

Scratching his head violently, striking his aching eyebrows with his fist, Subaru disparaged his own self.

What Subaru sought, was not spiritual salvation. What he sought was a key—— a power further evident, which was established in terms of proper efficacy.

The power which Subaru was ignorant of, which only "Natsuki Subaru" was cognizant of.

Just as Subaru had succeeded in the manifestation of Cor Leonis, the special "something" which only "Natsuki Subaru" had awakened, that was exactly it.

Subaru: "The key to change this situation, I have to believe it exists, or…"

The laceration of his guts, which had been the very last cause of his death from the present moment, touching the wound he was supposed to have from that, Subaru whispered.

His memories, began to overlap with what he had witnessed in Meili's Book of the Dead. An assault on the mansion, perpetrated by Meili's both beloved and troublesome elder sister, Elsa. A natural enemy for "Natsuki Subaru".

However, that was all about a world where everything had come to an end.

That was all about a world which "Natsuki Subaru" had already surmounted.

What was crucial, was not sympathizing with "Natsuki Subaru". But unveiling, and obtaining the deception only he was supposed to possess, which only he was using.

For that, only for that, he would read the Books of the Dead.

——Because, only for that, Natsuki Subaru had been dying and redoing his actions.

Subaru: "Please tell me, «Natsuki Subaru»! ——How are you special! How can only you, stay being special! There must be «something», right!?"

Subaru: "«Something», must have changed you! «Something» must have rid you of your uselessness, and turned you into someone else!"

Subaru: "Please change my weak, pathetic, petty self who can't be useful for shit! I'm fed up now! I can't see everyone suffering, not anymore!"

Subaru: "«Something»… "something"! Is there, right!? If «something» isn't there, then it doesn't make sense… «Something», happened… that's why, you're… different from, me… it has to be that way…"

——*It has to be that way, or I'll be forced to admit it.*

Subaru: "You were, the same as me, weak, petty, completely powerless…"

——Kneeling down time and time again, and on each instance having someone give a push to his back, as he wanted to recompense everyone who acted courteously towards him, as they had acted kindly towards him, he wanted to pay them back.

Subaru: "Please, «Natsuki Subaru». I request you. Please, just stop…"

——It would have had been much, much better, had he been a superhuman.

——He wished for him to be an existence completely dissimilar to his self, one who had transcended above weakness with both his ■ and body.

——That was why, he wished to be convinced by him that he had done, what his self could never achieve.

And yet——

Drawing Books out as if plucking berries, having his head struck by continually piling Deaths upon Deaths, all whilst having ■ shatter upon each instance of that, eagerly, earnestly, as if sipping mud, he gnawed into his lifeforce.

But still, until the very end of the end, he did not cast aside the possibility he clung onto——

Subaru: "————"

He opened, the Book he had in his grasp.

Prepared for his brain tissues being churned, for his ■ being violated, for his soul being humiliated, he opened it up.

After all, it was far more painful to have the very last hope severed, than to feel ache or anguish.

Subaru: "You get it, right, «Natsuki Subaru»…"

As if seemingly seeking consent, he called out to the person concerned who was not in presence here.

The tone of that voice felt as if it had sustained a terrible loss of ambition. That could not be helped.

After all, the person concerned was not someone to be enthusiastic about.

He was not that great of a man—— Whilst wishing for that to not happen, his fingers, as if pulling a rope, started to draw the Book of the Dead out.

And, what would follow would certainly be the finishing blow, with those feelings ——

???: "——Yeah, I get it."

Subaru: "————"

A white, white world. Upon noticing, Subaru was not in the Library, nor was he a shapeless existence overlapping with memories, but had been sent a place which he recognized, which was not here. There——

???: "I get it, Natsuki Subaru."

Subaru: "————"

???: "Because you're me after all, you know."

Standing still within the white world, *sanpaku*[240] eyes he was well acquainted with had been awaiting Subaru.

[240] *Sanpaku* is when the whites of the eyes are visible beneath the iris when resting, making the person look mad at all times.

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Setowi (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 74 – Natsuki Subaru

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 2 “Natsuki Subaru”, Parts 7-11

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

Short, black hair, legs with the same length as his upper body, eyes *sanpaku* enough to kill someone.

Those almost unpleasantly familiar features no matter which one was to be chosen, were overlooking Natsuki Subaru whilst sitting on the white, bare ground.

Subaru: “————”

Astounded, fixedly, he gazed a deep stare into the opposing person’s face.

No matter which angle he looked at it from, it was a face he was acquainted with—— no, it looked slightly different. That was perhaps because it was, in a true sense, not the form he was accustomed to seeing.

That which he had grown accustomed to looking at ordinarily, on overwhelmingly multiple occasions, was something reflected upon mirrors or the surface of water. Strictly speaking, the human face was not perfectly symmetrical on both halves, that alone shaped a sensitive disparity. That was why——

???: “Ah, I guess so. It’s not a mirror reflection so it feels a bit awkward, huh. In that sense, this is probably closer to imaging it as facing a photograph or a video recording, isn’t it.”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

???: “——? Ah, could it be you thought the same thing?”

When he slightly tightened his cheeks upon the single voice seemingly having read his mind, the opposing person guessed those feelings as well, precisely so.

Though his ■ was flustered for that as well, any response he could possibly give could neither serve as poison nor medicine. In the first place, what was essential for Subaru was not something on the likes of quick exchange of remarks.

It was something far greater exactly, the problem which would make everything quake was——

???: “Once again then… Hey, bro.”

Subaru: “————”

???: “No, «bro» feels slightly faulty for an expression, huh. More accurately… Hey, another me.”

Raising a single hand, the personage greeted with a relaxed tone—— no, he was not a person so unduly distant. He was an existence such that even calling him someone close would be a half-hearted expression.

After all, because the one present there was unmistakably was, with the same face as Natsuki Subaru, none other than “Natsuki Subaru”.

Subaru: “——«Natsuki Subaru».”

“Subaru”: “…What was with that slightly different intonation? On top of that, calling yourself by your full name… Though, I don’t know using what else would be correct. Though it’s a situation often present in *manga* and stuff, it’s pretty troublesome in reality.”

Subaru: “«Natsuki Subaru»…!”

Discerning rage for “Subaru”, who piled up remarks as if talking about good weather, Subaru stood right up at that spot. And as he tried to grasp the opponent’s collars, his legs tangled instantly.

With no strength driven into his knees, his stance crumbled——

“Subaru”: “Whoops, watch out.”

Subaru: “——Hk, don’t touch me!”

The “Subaru” right in front of him had caught his body, which had been pitching forward and falling. The moment he came in contact with those arms, Subaru experienced unbearable repugnance and shook off the opponent’s arms.

At the same pace, taking steps and distancing himself away from “Subaru”, he continued glaring at the other person.

Subaru: “Why are, you here… First of all, where is this place!?”

With “Subaru” within his field of vision, Subaru indicated the surrounding white world with his hands.

A white space, a place with nothing, which was just like the cradle of Od Lagna where he had confronted that Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Louis Arneb.

Subaru: “Shit…!”

It was a total mess inside of his mind.

In accordance with the real time that flowed within the Tower, his meeting with Louis was not something which had happened even scant hours ago.

However, for Subaru who had stockpiled multiple attempts pertaining to the five obstacles, it felt like an incident in the faraway, distant past.

Furthermore, Subaru had personally experienced the life and death of “Natsuki Subaru” more than twenty times through the Books of the Dead. Even if the contents of the Books of the Dead were something which felt short, running through life and death in less than five minutes, there had also been more than a year’s time in which nothing had occurred.

He had tasted those successively, indulgently. Plus, there were no guarantees regarding his cognition getting out of whack.

The passage of time had been vague, on top of that, he had much awaited this meeting with the unanticipated opponent.

Subaru widened his eyes and waved his arms about violently,

Subaru: “Why, are you in this place!?!?”

“Subaru”: “——It’s proof that you’ve caught up to me.”

Subaru: “————”

“Subaru”: “You read the Books of the Dead, and caught up to me. Everything you were not aware of, you must have seen it in the form of personally experiencing it. My life in another world, alright.”

Subaru: “Haa.”

With an indifferent tone, “Subaru” responded to Subaru, who had clamored, depleting his breath. Viewing that composed attitude, Subaru gritted his molars.

He was unable to stomach that conclusive expression, that attitude of seemingly knowing all, anything and everything.

——First of all, what did this man, making that odious face, say just now?

Subaru: “I… caught up to you?”

“Subaru”: “That’s right. There’s not a single thing anymore, which you don’t know about me. That’s why…”

Subaru: “——Don’t, joke around!!”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “I caught up to you, you say? Stop kidding! Don’t lie! Not yet! I don’t know about the most important thing, about that essential thing, yet!”

Roaring with his eyes open wide, Subaru seized hold of “Subaru’s” collars this time.

Upon that usage of brute strength, “Subaru” made no attempt to resist. Pulling the opponent’s collars towards himself like that, from a distance where both of their breaths entwined, he glared into those black eyes.

Subaru: “————”

Within the dark eyes of the face which was the same as his, the instant he perceived the same face reflected within, nauseating self-hatred surged within his own self.

Whether he harbored that self-hatred for himself or for the “self” present before his eyes, was neither known to him. Nor did he even contemplate considering it.

Merely remaining at that extremely close distance, he glared at the opponent and unraveled his fangs.

Subaru: “Tell me! It’s pretty convenient you’re here! Tell me now! The reason you became yourself has to be somewhere! I haven’t seen that. I haven’t found it. That is…”

“Subaru”: “The reason I became myself?”

Subaru: “That’s right! There must’ve been a cue for you to turn into yourself! You’re, you’re…”

“Subaru”: “——That must have been seen by you… No?”

With his collars seized, “Subaru” was gazing at Subaru, nonresistant.

He did not even try to repel away the arms waving him about. That gave Subaru the illusion that he was not even doing anything.

He perceived exactly that, as being looked down onto from a higher level——

Subaru: “Stop looking at me like that!”

“Subaru”: “——Gahk!”

Aiming at that unruffled profile, Subaru launched his fist.

The fist wielded firm impact, blowing “Subaru” off as if he had been flicked away. There was no recoil, no similar pain striking back at Subaru.

The pain “Subaru” sustained, injured, was only the pain “Subaru” had sustained.

That was, not identical to what Natsuki Subaru had sustained.

Subaru: “Just weaving words as if you know things… Is that so, I get it.”

Having been smacked by Subaru, “Subaru” had knelt down on his right leg. Observing him rubbing his struck cheek with the back of his hand, Subaru became convinced.

That the person ahead of his eyes, who spoke with as if he knew everything, was not mistaken.

First of all, if this was the cradle of Od Lagna—— the Hall of Memories, would that not make him the opponent he should be utmost vigilant of, above all other matters?

Subaru: “Are you, Louis? The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony! It’s you again, right!?”

“Subaru”: “…Me?”

Subaru: “Don’t play dumb!”

Last time, Louis, whom he had encountered in the Hall of Memories, had attempted to prompt segregation between Subaru and “Natsuki Subaru”, and eat that existence away from his head through one way or another.

Back then, he had managed to escape those fangs from a hair strand’s breadth worth of distance, but had their nature been such that they would be willing to give up through that alone and nothing more, they would not be called Sin Archbishops.

He had witnessed that in its entirety just how ugly, how irredeemable the existences known as the Sin Archbishops were.

Petelgeuse, Regulus, Sirius, Capella, all of them were the absolute lowest and worst of failures as personalities. Ley, Roy, and Louis were no exceptions to that either, he could especially affirm that.

What if Louis, who had been lying in wait inside of Reid’s Book of the Dead, had utilized some method to hide in ambush within the Book of the Dead of “Natsuki Subaru”?

Thus, it was plausible that she had lingered in wait for Subaru, boldly so.

Subaru: “Isn’t that true, Gluttony! Louis Arneb! There’s no way I can be confused by you, who can change shapes and forms, like this!”

Relying upon the Memories and Names stolen from others, extorting even the form of their opponents rather than just their abilities, chewing and digesting them as if they were her belongings; that was the Authority of Louis Arneb, as well as that of her elder brothers, Ley Batenkaitos and Roy Alphard.

She had demonstrated that artifice even within the Tower, lacking any regret. Nothing felt out of place even should the place in which she demonstrated that merely have been changed to the Hall of Memories.

Subaru: “Devouring me and hijacking me in that way, is that what your plan is? Even after being rejected once, persistent little… Do you really want to Return by Death so much!?”

Without any vacillation, he voiced the words “Return by Death”.

He had personally experienced the memory of having to taste hellish anguish by voicing that on several instances. The penalty of having his heart be held in a crushing grip came accompanied by immense pain. However, it was still alright if only he was to be the one to experience that agony—— Compared to the cases where it had befallen Emilia, or his surroundings.

However, the penalty was not invoked for Subaru, who had shouted whilst crushing faint horror.

“Subaru” before his eyes did not seem to have had his heart held in a crushing grip at all, either. In but a single instant he understood that “Subaru” had also been relieved at the lack of the evil influence’s ingress, seemingly having been on lookout for the same. That, was infuriating.

With the same face as his, he also bore the same thoughts as him—— He thought of it as an assertion that, to the very last, he and his opponent were the same.

Subaru: “——Hk! Just, get it already! Is this really that amazing of a power? Is this an admirable power!? It’s just dying, and redoing. Dying and redoing… nothing more than that. If I, who uses it, am shit, then the results it brings are also shit! That’s why…”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “That’s why, I couldn’t save anyone… I let everyone die. Because I’m weak, I make everyone miserable. Just like how, even now, nobody will get saved…!”

——Return by Death, was nothing so adequate.

Without doubt, it was a power as inferior as shit.

It would be far better to not have something like this be of need. Though there had been a Witch who claimed this power to be something splendid, an utmost prime thing, nonpareil in this world, he could never hold the same opinion.

Even if an ant was made to wield artillery, it could never utilize it. Ultimately, it was unsuited to it.

He was a weak, petty, lonely child who kept crying and throwing tantrums.

What the Witches in that dream Tea Party had stated, was correct. He was hopeless. He was weak. He could never find it. He could never use it. Both Gluttony and the Witch of Greed, failing to comprehend that, were damned.

Just, how many times would he have to get deceived, how many times would he have to get his hope trampled underfoot, how many times would he have to get his ■ vanquished, until he learned?

Why, after countlessly getting deceived, countlessly having his hope trampled underfoot, countlessly having his ■ vanquished, did he still think of doing it?

Return by Death displayed all of the unpleasant fragments of the world.

It displayed the absurdities, the irrationalities, the destiny enough to make one avert one's eyes. Yet, how come——

Subaru: "——I love, everyone."

Without noticing, with his head hanging down, kneeling down at that very spot, Subaru shouted as if casting a curse.

And upon that disgraceful grievance similar to weeping, "Subaru" horizontally shook his head. While shaking his head, once more he spoke, converging with his words.

"Subaru": "——I love everyone. That's why, I can't stop."

Subaru: "————"

Erasing the tinge of red on his struck cheek with his fingers, “Subaru” stood up in Subaru’s stead.

The same attire, the same expression, possessing the same face and name, “Natsuki Subaru”, who seemed to be decisively different from his self—— while looking at Natsuki Subaru,

“Subaru”: “The position you were put in, to be honest, even imagining its difficulty is rough. Everything completely new, *hajimeru* from *men* six while being low-level, without the option of going back[241]. The complaints you voice out too, I understand all of them. Because those, are wounds I have gotten to taste time and time again.”

With immense powerlessness, with immense ignorance, it was a countenance that had gotten to taste that countless times—— No, *he* had gotten to taste that countless times.

The defeat, the agony, the grief of Death which “Subaru” had to taste, Subaru was aware of it all. He had witnessed it all with these eyes. He had tasted it all, with this body and ■.

Precisely because he had tasted those, precisely because he knew that was not a lie, he could not accept “Subaru’s” words. He did not want to accept them.

“Subaru”: “Had I been strong, had I been smart, had I been more, more… Frustrating, isn’t it?”

Subaru: “Speaking as if, you understand it…! What the hell do you know about…”

“Subaru”: “I do know. You must also be aware of what I know. It’s a pointless quarrel, actually. For you and I both.”

Subaru: “——Hk.”

There was no strength in his words of objection. Naturally so.

An objection repelled the opponent’s words, brushed them away while suggesting lack of agreement, crushed them, posed the statement that they were wrong. Such an intention was essential.

[241] Two Engrish flips! First one means “(to) start” (始める), originally “スタート” (start). Second one is intended to mean “(video game) level/stage” (面), originally “ステージ” (stage). “Level” is also Engrish, but there isn’t a good equivalent that’s not a loanword.

Subaru of now, did not have the ability to face “Subaru” with that.

After all, he was aware of it.

He was aware that that was no lie or deceit, but the entirety of “Natsuki Subaru”.

Subaru: “I didn’t look at your memories, or anything…”

“Subaru”: “Hey, you can’t be doing this after looking through one’s diary as per your own convenience.”

Subaru: “I didn’t look at your memories, or anything!”

Upon hearing “Subaru’s” seemingly sullen voice, Subaru powerfully clenched his fists.

Slapped, poured with jeers, yet not bending his approach of dialogue, “Subaru” gave the impression of being far more mature than Subaru. Perhaps even that, was natural.

After all, truth was that “Subaru” was supposedly a year older than Subaru.

That too, he’d had rich experiences in the different world, having personally experienced Death on multiple occasions, and on top of that, he’d woven many bonds and acquiring the position of his current self. But still——

Subaru: “I didn’t look, at your memories or anything… Hk.”

Once again, once again Subaru utilized those words.

For once, right now “Subaru” said nothing to Subaru, who piled the very same repentances atop repentances. Subaru, without even seeking any response, resumed as if muttering incoherently.

Subaru: “I… wanted to have hopes for you. That you were an amazing guy, and that if I got to know the «something» which was supporting your amazing nature, I’d be able to do the same thing too. But still…”

But still, he had ended up knowing it.

He had ended up witnessing everything.

“Natsuki Subaru” had no differences whatsoever from the Natsuki Subaru present here; the latter had ended up knowing that that he was a weak and petty man.

In a period of time unknown to Subaru, he had met people unknown to Subaru, he had run past a chronicle unknown to Subaru, he had witnessed sceneries unknown to Subaru. He was merely an ordinary human who had done all that.

Subaru: “——By denying you, I wanted to proclaim something plausible and fulfill it.”

However, he could not do that.

Subaru: “After all, I understand your feelings—— Because you, are me.”

The world “Natsuki Subaru” had witnessed, had tasted, he had viewed it.

“Natsuki Subaru” had fallen in love with this world, with the people of this world, with Emilia and everyone else, so he had seen, as well as the wounds he had taken on for them to survive.

He had been misunderstanding. He had been misapprehending.

Since it was regarding himself, it was possibly appropriate to say he had conceited.

The illusion of “Natsuki Subaru” being a superhuman, had been shattered and cast aside.

Subaru: “Yeah, I get it! I got it! Why you… Why you kept standing up again and again, why you never gave up after dying again and again, is because that’s all you can do!!”

Just like Subaru, “Subaru” had also slammed into walls he could do nothing about on innumerable instances.

Upon each occasion of that, he died recurrently, repeatedly, amassing Deaths, and amending the way in which he met people, amending the way in which he connected to people, “Subaru” overcame hindrances.

That was all.

Subaru: “Can there be someone who won’t stand up despite Rem telling him so much to do so!? Acting conceitedly after being punched by Otto, I noticed that! I always knew that Dad and Mom were considerate like that! I mean, they are my Dad and Mom, after all!”

In the scenery “Natsuki Subaru” had passed through, the cue essential for surmounting things, was present not the “something” which Subaru sought, but merely accumulated wishes.

Subaru: “I love Emilia. I want her to rely on me to protect her. I want to be with her. The reason I wanted to be a Knight, was so that she thought of me that way. I was happy. I want to walk outside with her without any failures, she, who’s afraid of being hated, and I want to boast around that she’s someone capable of being loved by everyone! I finally had Beatrice accompany me outside. I want to make her happy for a time as long as the one she had been in pain. She has the right to be happy!”

That was why——

Subaru: “——The reason why you don’t give up, is just because you love everyone! Bloody bastard! Why aren’t you a superhuman!? Why are you still an idiotic brat!?!?”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “Be strong like Reinhard! Be someone who can do anything like Julius! If you can’t do that, then be useful like Ferris! How about exceeding in a single thing like Wilhelm-san!? Choose even one, for you to…”

By taking time and even experiencing agony, what he had realized was merely that.

That “Natsuki Subaru” was an ordinary human, that he only possessed the cards similar to those Subaru possessed, that he was in dire lack of skill for properly utilizing them, that neither did he have good fortune when it came to victory and defeat.

Even, a single one of just those——

Subaru: “Any single one of them…”

With a powerless voice, having forfeited all spirit, he whispered.

Any single one of them, even a single one of them, his hand incapable of wielding anything ought to grasp.

Subaru: “…You’re Louis, aren’t you.”

With a husky voice, he uttered a query unrelated to what he had said till now.

Listening to that, “Subaru”, who had remained silent for long nodded, saying “Ah”.

“Subaru”: “No. I’m not Louis. Unfortunately, I won’t say even that. I’d rather not have her disturbing. You don’t need an explanation for her personality being the worst, do you?”

Subaru: “Yeah… I guess, so.”

Responding with a meager, feeble voice, Subaru hid his own face with his arms.

Concealing that his throat had shriveled up due to his howling up until the previous moment, oozily, pain started to well up in his fist which had hit “Subaru”.

If this were the Hall of Memories, then Subaru’s body could not be stated to be a real entity here. That was how it was supposedly, and yet, it was absurd that he could feel pain.

——Yes, pain, Death, was ever absurd and ever difficult to bear.

That was accurately why Louis Arneb, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, was mistaken.

The thought of wishing it for her own self, was unmistakably mistaken.

Subaru: “…Why, did you disappear?”

“Subaru”: “Hm?”

Subaru: “Why did you vanish? You disappeared, that caused, so many hardships…”

The impetus of the ever-present incomprehension, and the origin of everything.

The reason why “Natsuki Subaru” had disappeared, and Natsuki Subaru was born.

Just what had happened to the body of “Natsuki Subaru”, who had disappeared alongside his memories?

Subaru: “The reason why you disappeared…”

“Subaru”: “…That was a total *shittai*[242] on my part. I entered Taygeta with the intention of finding a way to capture Reid. Then, through the series of events, it was all great till I found Reid’s Book, but…”

Subaru: “…Then, Reid’s Book turned out to be empty.”

“Subaru”: “Then I bumped heads with Gluttony. As for the rest, you probably get it even without me having to say it.”

Scratching his head, “Subaru” reminisced on his own shame.

Encountering Louis Arneb in the Hall of Memories, “Natsuki Subaru” had gotten his Memories stolen. And, forgetting all his life in another world until that point, his self, of course, had created Natsuki Subaru who could not apprehend the feelings of the people around him.

“Subaru”: “Don’t depreciate yourself like that… Would be difficult even if I tell you so, huh. After all, you’re me.”

Subaru: “…«Natsuki Subaru» is a weak, petty, irredeemable huge idiot.”

“Subaru”: “That’s not wrong.”

Subaru: “But…”

“Subaru”: “——?”

Whilst making a wry smile and gesturing his agreement, “Subaru” raised his eyebrows in response to Subaru, who had whispered powerlessly.

While looking at that “Subaru”, Subaru voiced the continuance of the words he had held back. That was——

[242] Engrish flip. Means “blunder” (失態), originally “ミス” (miss).

Subaru: “——You’re, an amazing guy, «Natsuki Subaru».”

——That was, his honest opinion lacking all exaggeration, having witnessed him Return by Death greater than twenty times.

△▼△▼△▼△

Subaru: “————”

Whilst looking at the man before him, he steadily narrowed his eyes.

With a face he was used to looking at, with a face he was tired of looking at, a face he thought that was even was distressful to look at, it was his own self. It was his own self, it was not his own self, though it was his own self, he did not believe it to be his own self.

That face had a reaction as if having been pricked with something unanticipated for the first time, it was gratifying.

Subaru: “…The closest person, huh.”

There were not many humans who loved their own self from the bottom of their heart.

Subaru particularly belonged to that category, Subaru hated himself. Perhaps “Natsuki Subaru” was no different in that regard either—— Subaru, and “Subaru”, hated himself.

However, as the closest person, once Natsuki Subaru laid eyes upon “Natsuki Subaru”, that saying this would be exceedingly embarrassing yet so cool was the thought that had crossed his mind.

Subaru: “I respect you, who’s weak, hopeless, unable to do anything, but still, continues to struggle, and loves them. That’s why——”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “——There was meaning in me, reading your Book of the Dead.”

He had not opened the Book of the Dead merely in order to digest his weakness, to grieve the cease of trails, to slam grudges on his self who had the same face as his own self.

Of course, neither was it to have the megalomania of tracing the foundations of the superhuman Natsuki Subaru, and therefore attaining unparalleled strength, granted.

What he had sought was learning that “Natsuki Subaru” was merely human, his deeds, his path.

“Subaru”: “…You sure are a guy, who says embarrassing stuff suddenly, you.”

Having remained frozen by Subaru’s oration until then, “Subaru” abruptly stirred.

“Subaru” had his eyes narrowed in ill humor—— no, in a state of feeling somewhat awkward, and, directing a sharp gaze at Subaru, he slowly stretched his fingers ahead,

“Subaru”: “It’s pretty questionable for me to say it myself, but you sure can say all that after having looked back onto my entire past up until now. Now that you mention, it’s something like «Natsuki Subaru’s Starting Life in a Different World from Zero».”

Subaru: “Ah, it feels so weird to have the main character’s name be the same as your own.”

“Subaru”: “It’s better than having the heroine have the same name as your mom, isn’t it… No, not that.”

Unreservedly reciprocating persiflage, Subaru exchanged a gaze with “Subaru”.

“Subaru”, who seemed somewhat to have tasted an under-shoulder swing-down[243], pointed at himself with his hand and,

“Subaru”: “I had said all that earlier, but is this seriously okay? The possibility of me being a fake from Louis hasn’t supposedly disappeared in its entirety, you know.”

Subaru: “It has disappeared. You didn’t revert even after I actually hit you.”

[243] Likely a bit of a pun going on here. Possibly both meanings of “肩透かし”, both the literal one of an actual fighting move and the one of “parrying questions”, are being employed here.

“Subaru”: “I mean, reverting because of that only happens if it were Yanagisawa’s *mosha* ability[244]…”

As per “Subaru’s” objections, that could not truly be used as rationale.

However, at that point in time, Subaru had let go of his skepticism regarding “Subaru”.

The reason for that was perhaps what “Subaru” had commented earlier.

For argument’s sake, even if Louis Arneb were to eat away one’s life away from head-to-toe without sparing a single part, he believed that she would not be able to reconstruct that face, that voice.

Because she did not have the ability to comprehend blessedness, felicity, happiness. That was why——

Subaru: “She, who loved nobody, cannot understand the emotion of Returning by Death for the sake of someone you love.”

“Subaru”: “————”

“Subaru” before his eyes kept silent, as Subaru took a long, painful inhale.

Now that he had voiced it out, it was terribly stale, naught but sweet nothings pleasing to hear, nothing more. Yet he had been unable to discover any other responses.

Hence why the “Subaru” before his eyes was unquestionably “Natsuki Subaru”.

Subaru: “Why are you here? Were you waiting for me?”

He recognized the “Subaru” before his eyes to be possessing the same foundation as himself.

On top of that, the doubt surfacing in his mind regarded the two Subarus happening upon each other here.

Upon that question of Subaru’s, “Subaru” took a firm step on the pure white floor,

[244] YuYu Hakusho reference. The Engrish flip uses the Japanese description of this character’s ability, means “copy” (模写), originally “コピー” (copy).

“Subaru”: “The reason why you and I met each other here, is because this place is the sole point of contact between you and me.”

Subaru: “The point of contact, between you and me…”

“Subaru”: “The reason me, whose Memories are within the Tower, and you, who doesn’t have Memories, crossed one another is just because of the Books of the Dead in this loop. You and I couldn’t have met each other after this and before this both.”

Subaru: “——On second thought, let’s go back to the first question. Why, are you here?”

Unconvinced by the explanation “Subaru” had given, Subaru, once again, cast the same question.

Strictly speaking, he could not comprehend the logic behind the two Subarus coming across each other here. It had ended up being that “Subaru”, who possessed Memories, and Subaru, who did not possess Memories, both existed alongside each other.

——The rules of the formation of a Book of the Dead, its intricacies were unknown.

Now that it was mentioned, that Books of “Natsuki Subaru” had accumulated up to the number of times he had died until now was strange in itself. Precisely that was a phenomenon that unless the Deaths of “Natsuki Subaru” were not being observed by something other than the world, it would not come into existence.

Did that mean Od Lagna fulfilled that role as spectator?

Subaru: “But if that’s the case then if Louis, who was in the Hall of Memories, had been observing Return by Death, I don’t know for what reason she would be in such high-spirits. If she can recognize that from the outside…”

“Subaru”: “She may be staying in the Hall of Memories, but she can’t be its ruler. Its ruler is… probably a guy even more nasty, I think. Taking this situation into consideration…”

Subaru: “I get it when you say it’s a nasty guy. The one most plausible is…”

Halting words there for once, Subaru and “Subaru” collectively stated.

Subaru & “Subaru”: “——Sage Flugel.”

They called that, to be the ill-natured utmost plausible personage.

The personage who had connections to the establishment of this Pleiades Watchtower, who had installed an Examination such that Reid was placed in it, and furthermore, had imposed four hundred years of asceticism upon Shaula with unknown deadline.

In all honesty, Shaula was pitiable. He wished to snatch her away from that master of hers, if possible.

Subaru: “Then, the reason for my selves possessing and not possessing Memories existing alongside is…”

“Subaru”: “——That’s the type of question difficult to find an answer for. Since I’m here, and you’re here.”

Subaru: “That’s just how, it is, huh…?”

Whilst feeling a sense of unease, taking in “Subaru’s” words, Subaru drew his chin in.

Truth was, it had been the kind of question lacking a question setter. Even if theories of some kind were to be arrived at, in the end, they could never provide the answer.

If this question had to be investigated thoroughly, and the answer had to be found, then——

Subaru: “As long as you truly aren’t Louis Arneb, it shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Subaru”: “That’s a pretty bothersome way to confirm. Do you, really trust me?”

Subaru: “I trust you, I trust you. If you let me hit you one more time on the other side, I’ll trust you even more.”

“Subaru”: “Is that so. I wouldn’t say it’s the best bargain, you know.”

Interchanging frivolous dialogue in a relaxed manner, Subaru shrugged his shoulders at “Subaru’s” words.

The cowardly way of conversation for delaying the core of the dialogue like this, with other people aside, when employed against himself, it had been seen through far too easily.

That is why, Subaru took it upon himself and for the third time, fired the same question.

Subaru: “Heeey, other me—— For what purpose, are you here?”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “You must also know I won’t take something like that.”

Upon “Subaru’s” attitude, who opted for reticence, Subaru whispered with his black eyes straitened. Even after hearing that, he did not return persiflage similar to what they’d had until this moment.

Instead of that, what levitated in “Subaru’s” black eyes was the radiance that had always been present since the beginning.

Perhaps that was what was known as, and was often called, a feeling of guilt——

“Subaru”: “——Hey, what do you think will happen, in unification of memories?”

That was why, Subaru had deliberately asked that question cheerfully.

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Subaru: “——In the *okimari*[245] of a conversation of this sort, what’d be the normal answer, huh.”

“Subaru”: “I have no idea. Clearly, it feels like something which has no answer to it.”

Subaru: “To be honest, you seem to be the more knowledgeable one here, do you know about any rules that would be advantageous to know about which I don’t?”

“Subaru”: “You read the Book dissecting me[246], didn’t you. It’s half-and-half.”

Subaru: “Half-and-half, huh.”

[245] Engrish flip. Means “standard/routine/stereotype” (お決まり), originally “パターン” (pattern).

[246] The expression used here is “解体新書” (read Kaitai Shinsho), which is the name given to the first medical book from the Western world translated into Japanese. For more information, see here.

“Subaru”: “Half-and-half.”

Subaru: “…If something like you and I carelessly bump into each other and one eliminates the other happens, what will you do?”

“Subaru”: “Don’t say all that. Whatever you think when anxious, is generally what I also think when anxious.”

Subaru: “That’s it, huh? Then, no hard feelings no matter which one wins, hm?”

“Subaru”: “No, I’ll be crazy bitter for sure. And if I’ll be bitter, then that means you’ll be bitter too.”

Subaru: “Well, I guess so. That’s, probably right. Hmmm~, pretty shallow-■ed huh.”

“Subaru”: “What did you say?”

Subaru: “Pretty shallow-■ed… Huh, is something wrong?”

“Subaru”: “…No, I just probably misheard, I guess.”

Subaru: “————”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “Ah, that’s right. There are some things you might be wondering about their likelihood, so there are some things I want to tell you, can I?”

“Subaru”: “Well, since you’ve heard everything I’ve said up till now, go right ahead and say whatever.”

Subaru: “Originally, you were more informed than me regarding this world… Though that advantage has more-or-less disappeared because I read the Books of the Dead, there are some things that have changed a bit, you know?”

“Subaru”: “Things that have changed?”

Subaru: “After losing Memories, I talked to everyone, I got to know everyone… it’s the story of «Natsuki Subaru’s Starting Life in a Different World from Zero» you don’t know about.”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “First up, Meili, okay. She’s a bit, in many ways, saddled with bombs upon herself so it’s rough, but she understands if you talk to her so please, have a proper talk with her. I’m imagining Meili-senpai’s pretty angry right now.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah, got it.”

Subaru: “And then, there’s this huge scorpion wandering about inside the Tower, but its true identity is Shaula. That makes things really dangerous but… she’s not doing that because she wants to. Please, help her too.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah, got it.”

Subaru: “Oh, by the way, I forgot to say this, but when I met Louis I got my back kicked hard by Rem. Back then, I didn’t remember Rem, so it was only after I read the Book that I recalled what kind of girl Rem was, but… Hmm, as expected, that was my Rem.”

“Subaru”: “No, it’s my Rem, you know.”

Subaru: “No, mine.”

“Subaru”: “Mine.”

Subaru: “————”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “Ram did say. That when the season of snowmelt arrives, things invisible will be visible and will surely show their faces… As expected of her.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah, I guess so.”

Subaru: “About that guy, Julius… Well, it’ll be fine even if I don’t say anything, yeah? He’s not that unreliable, if I must tell you something about him.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah, agreed.”

Subaru: “Thank you, for apologizing, to Dad, and Mom.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah, hmm.”

Subaru: “Thank you, for saving Otto, and Garfiel.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah.”

Subaru: “Thank you, for saving Petra, Frederica, and everyone from Arlam Village.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah.”

Subaru: “Thank you, for taking Beatrice out, and holding her hand.”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “Emilia…”

“Subaru”: “————”

Subaru: “Thank you, for liking Emilia. I also like her. I really love her.”

“Subaru”: “…Yeah, I know.”

Subaru: “——Natsuki Subaru. You’re an amazing guy, I sincerely know that, if it’s you, then it’ll certainly be alright.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah.”

Subaru: “————”

“Subaru”: “Hm… I guess so.”

Subaru: “————”

“Subaru”: “Yeah—— If it’s us, then it’ll certainly be alright.”

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Subaru: “It’ll be alright, huh.”

“Subaru”: “Yeah, that’s right. It’ll be alright.”

Subaru: “You, are amazing, I sincerely know that.”

“Subaru”: “…Yeah, but, hmm. I have to say this.”

Subaru: “————”

“Subaru”: “——Looks like my summer vacation is over[247].”

△▼△▼△▼△

With a shake of their hands, a clichéd exchange marked the finale.

Subaru: “————”

He inhaled, and exhaled.

Likely, the unification had not been conducted in an irregular form—— No, by all rights, there had been no supposition that the process of unification was to be carried out in this place.

Subaru’s very existence, all happenings that had very much occurred, all of them had been irregular. That was why——

Subaru: “————”

Standing stock still, Subaru finally noticed tears rivulet down his own cheeks, dripping down his chin and falling as droplets.

For some reason or another, he did not feel like wiping them off, as seemingly those streaming tears certainly had not been shed by Subaru, from what it seemed.

[247] Kingdom Hearts reference in more than one way, as there’s a scene similar to this in one of the games.

The tears shed by someone, who was right now, steadily melting together with Subaru, within Subaru.

And, repeatedly breathing deeply, he went around the consciousness within his mind. What had been scorched within his own memories, were——

Subaru: "——Hk."

Suddenly, twenty Deaths Natsuki Subaru was unmindful of, flashed back.

All of them told of struggling and writhing within the Tower, and the numerous Deaths which became a part of the course of events had been experience—— as if getting taken over, the visuals of all worrying sections established a connection.

They had established a connection, but.

Subaru: "You're crossing over the bridge even more than what's sufficient, you know…!"

His other self, who had lined up words thoroughly commending Subaru. Digesting his fight in solitude and his heavy struggle for trusting his comrades, Subaru arrived to an understanding.

Certainly, it was just as what Subaru had stated—— *I can, respect you.*

With such thoughts, deep breathing as if trying to decelerate his eccentrically rapid pulsebeat, he bowed his head.

After that, Subaru raised his face, and stared ahead of him.

That, was the unchanging white space.

An area of blank space resulting from the Hall of Memories, which had produced his irregular state.

At the place where another Subaru had been until merely a few moments earlier, who had shaken hands with Subaru—— was the petite shadow of someone crowding that space, and looking down onto it, Subaru straitened his black eyes. And——

Subaru: "So. Did you get to see what you wanted to see—— Louis Arneb."

Subaru softly asked that to the one who had proceeded to read through his Books of the Dead, to then reach this place and subsequently disappear, Natsuki Subaru—— no, Louis Arneb.

Arc 6 Chapter 75 - Louis Arneb

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 3 “Louis Arneb”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Want to become, happy.

△▼△▼△▼△

——What are termed as the positives and negatives of life, are great gambles determined by birth and environment.

That was the philosophy Louis Arneb had acquired, upon the extremity of eating and hunting down the lives of innumerable humans, as the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony.

Louis Arneb, was the youngest among the three siblings who were Sin Archbishops affixed with Gluttony.

By nature, contrary to the scale and unsound state of control of its activity, the Witch Cult’s true state of affairs was surprisingly unascertained, though much regarding the Sin Archbishops in particular was enveloped in mystery.

Although the principal source for that was that the majority of people who happened upon them had lost their lives, the ones to have their names well-known even amongst Sin Archbishops—— no, it ought be in past tense, so the ones who “had their names well-known” had certainly been the two of Sloth and Greed.

Aside from those, even if it was known that the Sin Archbishops of Wrath, Lust, and finally, Gluttony existed, for several years it had been shrouded in mystery what kind of a bunch they were. And to boot,

the very existence of Louis Arneb, the youngest sister among the trio of siblings of Gluttony, save for fellow Sin Archbishops with them being the only exception, was unknown.

The concealed Sin Archbishop, that had been the position in which Louis Arneb stood.

Louis: “Well, it’s not as if we wished for it, you know.”

So whispered Louis, stretching her legs within the white space she had been in since birth.

Impotently, Louis could not exit this white space, and did not have the ability to meet anyone. Unable to exercise the Authority of Gluttony anywhere except in the location where it was highly restricted as well, was what was called an unused treasured possession to her.

However, thanks to her two elder brothers, when it came to meals had she not been incapacitated.

That was because the Memories and Names her elder brothers ate—— that was to say, the lives of others, that food could be snatched by someone uninvolved as her, enabling her to fulfill her hunger.

Louis: “Why, do we have to be like this?”

Fulfilling her hunger through her elder brothers’ leftovers, whilst indulging in the lives of others, Louis, who was having her self-identity molded and taking form little-by-little, immediately discerned that she was in circumstances entirely different from others.

Without a body that could be free, what she could operate was merely consciousness.

Though she possessed the Memories of having walked, she possessed no experience of having walked. That was, the defective article known as herself.

Louis: “Ah… we are, in such unhappy circumstances.”

That was how Louis recognized to herself, that she was in a “sorrowful” environment.

And, she understood these circumstances would not change, regardless how much she lamented.

In order to console their younger sister lost adrift within such sorrow, her elder brothers seemingly vied with each other and ate. And provided their little sister, the same platters they had eaten themselves.

Those platters which her elder brothers served to her, were brimming with respective individuality.

Ley, who named himself Gourmet, loved lives with strong flavors for both better or worse.

Roy, of Bizarre Eating, anyhow gave precedence to amount, becoming entranced for fulfilling hunger with off-flavors.

From Louis's perspective, if she had to say, then she had been able to enjoy the platters chosen by Ley on numerous occasions, but on numerous occasions she had also made gains from the platters chosen by Roy, who ate and hunted in an unprincipled manner.

Chewing and digesting eleventy lives, comparing flavors by rolling them atop her tongue and within her mind, what she came to understand—— That was, the difference in the absolute amount of "joyfulness".

Louis, who possessed the power to compare the lives of others through her own sense of values, graded various items such as the difference of wealth and poverty or the presence or absence of affection, from the environment of growth to family and friends, the existence of lovers, through a formula based on their extent awarding scores to the lives of others from one to the next, rating them continuously.

For being prosperous by birth. For being loved by parents and siblings. For living a life sailing smooth without any trials or tribulations. For having a great number of friends, who could be reached out to in times of difficulty. For possessing overflowing talent, such that it was possible to stand above all others.

Either this or that or this or that, regardless of fortune and misfortune, there were countless reasons such for some to be able to be discarded.

Though it was an idea terribly prideful and conceited, Louis possessed the Authority to make it attainable.

If it were to be expressed in alternate words, that was equivalent to the act of peeping onto the screen of a game other people were playing, complaining and pointing out they should have done this and they should have done that, all whilst ridiculing them.

Knocking disdain and mockery across the entire screen, she criticized the lives of others as per her own conveniences as a bystander. Showering jeers as well, striking frank impressions lacking all distinction between likes and dislikes as well, all to her own contentment.

Those were Louis's deeds. Rating as per her principles, egoistic abuse and slander.

However, that which she enjoyed at first, soon turned wearisome as well.

That was natural. What Louis could do, was to review the Memories passed onto her, she could not interfere with anything further. She did not possess the ability to speak of the present and the future.

Even if she tried to speak ill of or correct the gameplay of others, there was nobody who would lend an ear to what she would point out. Hence why she came to lose her initial amusement.

To incessantly look at the play of unskillful humans, was close to torture rather than just being tedious.

Louis: "Even though if we allowed to, then we would do it so much much muuuch~ better. Because each and every single one of them is incompetent."

Despite possessing feet to walk their own life, despite having arms to cut through distress, despite owning a head to picture the future, all other people were brainless.

Louis's elder brothers, Ley and Roy, were no exceptions to that either. Rather, they could be called the incarnation of ineptitude.

If Memories would be peeped into, it could be well understood what that life had failed at, and at what point had it become unable to recover. All of them, accumulated failures terribly simple and trivial.

Why would one stumble at such a spot, Louis was unable to comprehend at all.

Louis: "Incompetent, incompetent, incompetent. If you're going to live irresponsibly, then hand it over to us, that life. We will do it way way waaay~ better. Everyone everyone everyone, is too brainless."

From one to the next, "lives" ought to be felt contempt for were itemized in the form of platters.

Chewing and digesting numerous, multitudinous of them, Louis was overwhelmed with rage, and became nauseous.

Without realizing such emotions in Louis's ■, her elder brothers, who successively resumed eating for fulfilling their own desires, were something she also felt irritated at. Without even feeling anxious for

their younger sister, who was making a nauseous expression, the folly of continuing to provide filled platters incessantly, what could she possibly detest could she not detest that.

Louis: "Ah, you sure eat while finding it delicious, onii-chan."

Louis: "Ah, you sure eat while finding it fun, nii-sama."

Louis: "——Ah, we are, *we*[248] are, even now even now, feeling nauseous, you know."

That was the reason why, Louis Arneb named herself Satiation.

Starvation that would not be fulfilled no matter how much was eaten.

For what was starved was not her body, but her ■.

△▼△▼△▼△

——Want to become, happy.

——Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy.

△▼△▼△▼△

Louis: "——Ahahahaha! This is, this is the feeling of walking outside, isn't it! Both onii-chan and nii-sama, doing this the whole time… Ahhh, unfair unfair unfair!"

Within the enforced confinement, her shackled self-consciousness followed the lone road to expansion.

Just as eating facilitated healthy growth amongst humans, while being provided with platters unwished for as well, Louis underwent favorable growth vigorously.

[248] A slight pronoun change, from "私たち" to "あたしたち". This is common in the Gluttonies' speech, they all use different plural pronouns.

The same was also the case with Ley and Roy, her two elder brothers.

Her elder brothers too, had their own ego enlarge rampantly, having their ■ feel greater zeal for meals. The insensible food selection by such elder brothers of hers, Louis anyhow felt irritated by.

That change had been, a byproduct of Louis's such growth, and irritation.

Louis: "This is air from outside! This is water from outside! This is soil from outside! This is blood from outside! Ahhh, amazing amazing amazing! It's real! It's reaaal!"

Lying sprawled on bare earth, whilst lovingly licking the soil, having their fill of the world with their entire body was a young boy—— no, though that very flesh body belonged to the personage who called himself as Ley Batenkaitos, the content within it was disparate.

It was not Ley wielding the right of control over that flesh body, and moving about freely.

Believed to possess the fate of being unable to leave the white world from birth, Louis Arneb—— the Sin Archbishop of tragedy, had her form break through the white cage for the first time.

It had been a coincidence.

Certainly, she did not think the Authority possessed such an ability. Or perhaps Louis's craving spirit had stimulated the Authority to bloom instead, there was no definite answer. Neither was it momentous.

What was momentous, was that this had been realized—— That she, had walked outside.

Louis: "Ahahahaha! Ahahahahahaha!"

Intervening between her restricted reality, Louis grandly guffawed for the fruit it bore.

It had become possible for her to borrow her elder brothers' bodies, and independently manipulate that body, that Authority. And——

???: "Huh? Ley, just what is the meaning of thiiis. While putting on airs for being something like Gourmet and fastidious, are you sure you didn't get too hungry and go crazy?"

Louis: “Ahhahaha! That’s wrong that’s wrong, that’s completely wrong. That’s wrong anyway, as that’s wrong, that’s certainly wrong, as that’s certainly wrong, that is wrong, because that’s wrong!”

???: “————”

Louis: “We are, Witch Cult Sin Archbishop representing Gluttony, Louis Arneb.”

Saying so, Louis gave greetings to the baffled Roy Alphard, using the body of Ley Batenkaitos.

For this had been the first time ever since she was born, did she get to even converse with her elder brothers, after all.

Louis: “It’s the cute, cute little sister, the third sibling of onii-chan and nii-sama. Please be loving, please be doting, please be well wishing, and please be caring, okay?”

△▼△▼△▼△

——Want to become, happy.

——Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy.

*——Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy.

△▼△▼△▼△

By borrowing the bodies of her elder brothers, she acquired a method to meddle with the outside world.

Her elder brothers' supply of food did not halt, and as always, never did she suffer with hunger.

However, such long awaited opportunities, and jumping out into the outside world she much yearned for, Louis Arneb had grown tired of it before long—— She had ended up growing tired of it.

Louis: "Outside is pretty boring, more than what we thouuught."

In the end, a borrowed body was a borrowed body.

There lay no change in the fact that the real form of her self, who was unable to be free, was trapped inside the white world.

Rather, by firmly making certain of her shadow, she strangled her throat by herself.

Louis: "In the end, something like life… is not what you eat, or even how much you eat. It's who you eat with, and despite that…"

Her elder brothers were living lives of their own. That had to be, why they were not seeking it.

Louis alone had been dispossessed of her own life. That had to be, why she was eternally seeking it.

Louis: "Want to become happy."

Within the white world, whilst untidily scattering around countless Memories, she wished for that with all her ■.

That could have perhaps been the greatest—— or the sole desire, of Louis Arneb.

Louis: "Want, to become happy."

A desire unfulfilled.

Unfading regardless of her borrowing the bodies of her elder brothers, or kicking others as per her liking.

Albeit tasting rich “lives” and getting drunk on momentary pleasures, it all perished immediately.

Louis: “Want to become happy.”

She grew tired of it. She had grown tired of it.

She wished for a life, which belonged to herself, and her alone. She wished for a body, a soul, a destiny.

Louis: “Want to become happy.”

Louis was sorrowful.

The origin of Louis’s sorrow was that a life which was her own existed nowhere.

Louis: “Want to become happy.”

However, at the same time, Louis knew herself.

Even if her nature was fickle, easily resigning ego to attain a life that had suddenly appeared before her, was something inconceivable for her to be satisfied by. After all, she had known.

In this world lay countless lives, in them lay an absolute amount of joyfulness, primarily determined upon the result of incorrigible great odds.

In what way would things play out for a human belonging to a poor residence born into the harsh Holy Kingdom of Gusteko.

In what way would things play out for a human weak by birth born into Vollachian Empire, where the strong were valued.

In what way would things play out for a slow-footed nitwit born into Kararagi City-States, which expected perpetual progress.

In what way would things play out for a mixed race, silver-haired half-devil born into the Kingdom of Lugunica, which was spoiled by ancient customs.

By possessing the selves of others, Louis was aware that they would not have a decent time.

However, to say joyfulness would be being affluent in certain aspects, would be an immense mistake as well.

Being born into the household of a great priest in the Holy Kingdom of Gusteko, being born into the household of a general in the Vollachian Empire, being born into the household of a distinguished merchant in Kararagi City-States, being born into the household of any kind of an influential noble in the Kingdom of Lugunica, continuing ceaselessly as one looked upward.

Louis, did not want to be inferior. She wanted to be affluent. She did not want to be looked down upon.

She had continued rating the lives of others.

Within those, naturally there were lives who had received the worst evaluation, but withal there were lives who had received the highest evaluation. It was not as if all items to be graded within them were the greatest. Even those highest evaluated lives, she could not gain satisfaction by.

Louis: “Ahhh, want to become happy.”

——Ley and Roy, around that time, discovered a novel transfiguration in the Authority, Eclipse.

The ability the Authority of Gluttony was endowed with, was the ability to plunder the Memories, the Names from others, chewing and digesting them. Applying that in practical use, the Authority of Solar Eclipse and Lunar Eclipse which reconstructed the plundered populace.

Drawing out techniques or knowledge from the Memories of others, and using them as one’s own belonging, Lunar Eclipse.

It drew out skills to their utmost, not the benefits of the likes of physical abilities, so the possibility of not utilizing that power perfectly was high.

Conversely, Solar Eclipse used the captured Name as foundation, and reconstructed the person’s existence in its entirety, completely reconstructing the techniques polished by that flesh body, it could manifest strength to its maximum.

As an ability, it went without saying that Solar Eclipse was overwhelmingly superior, but her two elder brothers preferred to exercise not Solar Eclipse, but Lunar Eclipse—— No, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they feared using Solar Eclipse, and found it repugnant.

According to Ley and Roy's cognizance, Solar Eclipse seemed to drag along the thinking in the flesh body which had transformed.

That sensation felt as if their selves were being damaged, an unendurable one, was the two's reasoning. Hearing what her elder brothers had to say, Louis, from the bottom of her ■, found it to be utterly ludicrous.

Despite even possessing their own flesh bodies, despite standing on a position where even their person had been established, to not be able to preserve their selves possessing firm beliefs, how deficient and puny must that self-consciousness be.

It had to be a joke, for them to assume the airs of being more sorrowful than her, who had not possessed a flesh body of her own, who did not have even her siblings be cognizant of her existence for greater than ten years, for having, at last, grown tired of even the sourness and sweetness of life.

The Authority of Solar Eclipse was very much splendid. Rather, for Louis it was convenient.

It would be no misstatement to say that precisely this was the power Louis Arneb had longed for.

——Louis Arneb was craving for a life belonging to her alone, a life which was the greatest.

That was unlike her elder brothers' self-pleasure, who gained contentment by eating the lives of others and capturing Memories. A right further refined and ubiquitous—— Louis, wanted to live.

Birth could not be chosen.

That was the entire source of what brought forth sorrowful humans. However, Louis was different.

Louis, had acquired the power, the opportunity, to choose her birth, her life. She could heist the Memories of others, reconstruct them by way of Solar Eclipse, and make it to be her own belonging.

She had the ability, to choose life—— She could choose again, everything.

She would be fastidious, seeking the greatest Memories and Name which she was yet to see.

Though there had been some aligned favorably amongst what all Ley and Roy had eaten, they had not been perfect. There had been a dearth of novelty and ingenuity.

Happy homes, tender parents, wealthy livelihoods and rich environments, magnificent friends and seemingly destined companions, all of it seemed naught but “happiness which had seemingly been seen somewhere else”.

She was searching for not that, but the greatest life.

Possessing the ability to choose as per one’s liking did not coincide with the fact that one would not get tired of what one was choosing. Getting tired of the countless platters lined up before her eyes, what could she possibly find enjoyable.

Louis Arneb, was searching for the greatest life—— She had been searching.

That was why——

△▼△▼△▼△

——That was why, when she happened upon Natsuki Subaru, Louis’s chest pulsated intensely.

Louis: “Oho? Onii-san is… Umm, Natsuki Subaru, was it?”

To be precise, it did not throb the instant she had met him.

Natsuki Subaru’s outward appearance was not to Louis’s taste, to make it throb the instant of meeting him.

From the start, though his face seemed to be not to her taste, in accordance with the sense of values cultivated within Louis, the beauty which a vast majority of humans pictured would be precisely the face Louis would seek.

In that sense, there did not exist even a single atom which would throb for Natsuki Subaru’s outward appearance.

Moreover, from Louis's perspective, Natsuki Subaru was certainly a personage she had already known, but he was not someone she had been attentive of simply because he was in the Memories of others.

Though it was something not requiring much thought, the Memories present within Louis went up to enormous numbers. It was not simple to draw out the sought-after Memories from within that.

All the more when the other person was one she held no interest in.

The reason why Louis yet recollected the other person's name at a single glance was because one of her elder brothers—— Ley Batenkaitos, had been considerably attached to that name, rather than Louis.

If she were not mistaken, then there had been something mightily attached to Natsuki Subaru amongst the platters Ley had eaten.

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "This place? This place you see, is the cradle of Od Lagna… the Hall of Memories. The place where the souls of dead people are filtered. As it's rare for a person to come here with their selves intact, you shall be welcomed, onii-san. We have too much boredom at hand, you see."

Smiling sinisterly, Louis gave a warm reception to the visit of the rare guest.

Truth be told, there lay no dishonesty in those feelings of welcome. Louis longed for others, quite a bit.

The birthplace of Louis Arneb, the white world she could not leave, the Hall of Memories.

The reason why Louis was aware that this place had been designated that title, that the gigantic existence of unknown disposition was a workshop of such an enormous scale, was the result of her mobilizing all the knowledge in the Memories Ley or Roy had eaten and hunted down.

Within the ones fallen prey to the Authority of Gluttony, there had been many wise men who, in reality, had performed great studies which would remain for posterity, who had made historical findings. Without seeing the light of day, they had settled at the bottom of the bellies of the three Gluttony siblings, but they were profoundly serving Louis.

In all honesty, Louis was not at all interested in the reason why she was born here, or why she was confined here.

Neither would there be any means to dispel those doubts, nor did she find it to be meaningful. She had assented it as being just how things were. Even if she were suddenly taken into the outside world at this point, it would have merely been troublesome in its own way.

The day she would leave this place, had to be the day she has discovered the greatest life.

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Awah! Sorrysorry, we still haven't exchanged names, isn't it! But, forgive us! After all, introductions in this form don't happen often in this place, you see!"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Well then, let's introduce ourselves one more time! ——We are Sin Archbishop of the Witch Cult, representing Gluttony, Louis Arneb."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Don't know if it'll be for a long while or a short one, but please be caring, okay, onii-san?"

The other person was exceedingly surprised and distressed with regards to Louis, who had named herself in that manner.

Obviously enough, standardly, humans who stepped foot here did not possess the aim of arriving there. Though occasionally there were some who thus slip in, Louis considered that as something like lost souls—— rephrasing, the consequence of near-death experiences.

A situation where the soul had been calmly detached from the flesh body, or a situation where it had come unstuck, perhaps.

From their perspectives, such situations were close to the feeling of being summoned out of the blue by Od Lagna.

If that were to be considered, possibly, Louis's role was something like a guide who quelled the turmoil of people who had experienced near-death, and elucidated what this place was.

If that were to be considered as being atop Od Lagna's invisible palm, that was, again, infuriating.

Of course, Louis hated being looked down upon, but she also despised being directed.

That was the same as Od Lagna, an existence for whom that perpetually was the usual state of things. Louis did not want her life, which yet remained to commence, to be distorted by the interference of anyone but Louis.

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Eh? Of course we do know? Ley and Roy… Onii-chan and nii-sama, right? Ah, ah, don't get so excited, onii-san! As the two are just devoted to their little sister, you know."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "The two of them devouring people here and there too, is partly for our sake. They lack brains, and don't have a grasp on our preferences at all either, but they're being considerate. Probably, right? But it can't be helped, right? After all, all three of us have never even been together."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "By borrowing onii-chan or nii-sama's body, you see, we have gone outside for a wee bit at times, you know? But, when we do that the one lending his body goes to sleep and can't be met! That's why, all three of us have never been together. Awah, spilled that out."

Enumerating whilst speaking rapidly in somewhat agitation, Louis carefully observed the opponent's reaction.

Slight panic, just a smidgen of daze. Somewhat preponderant rage, and a fairly strong sense of purpose. What was perplexed at first, had now regained presence of mind, possessing the ambience of trying to proceed ahead logically.

Louis: "Heeeh…"

Not bad, with that thought in her innermost ■, Louis licked her lips.

Whether it should be labelled as being accustomed to diving into scenes of carnage, he was suitably fast in adapting to situations. If observed and compared with the impression she had received at first, that was quite a mismatching attribute.

That which varied greatly from the original attribute, *a posteriori*, too was an attribute compelled into polishing.

What lay at its origin, Louis incited her appetite with interest, and alongside——

Louis: "——Ah, there it is there it is. This is it, right, onii-san."

Whilst conversing, what Louis towed out were certain Memories.

The greatest reason why Ley, through a single platter which he had indulged in, was attached to the juvenile before her eyes—— Reeling in and collecting the Memories mightily, potently calling out to that existence, Louis synchronized with them.

Louis: "——Awa."

At that precise moment, her breathing was obturated by feelings of love overflowing from the interior of her chest.

Welling up unaware of any bounds, the feelings of love for the juvenile within her sight. He was so beloved, so beloved, so in love with, it was unbearable. Louis's small chest heated up, and her entire body throbbed with a sweet premonition.

With her eyes moist, her breaths sweet and warm, her lips smiled. And——

Louis: "Please don't make such an anxious face—— Subaru-kun."

——Upon that instant, there existed mighty, potent rejection.

Subaru: "————!!"

Honing his eyes whilst maintaining his rage, Natsuki Subaru charged ahead in a pounce.

Though she possessed the impulse to accept that outburst from him by spreading both her arms wide, she somehow immobilized that, and slipped into his chest in accordance with the Memories.

Catching ahold of the juvenile's arms with smooth movement, pulling him towards herself she gave him a twisting throw. With a flesh body which was not a real object, hallucinating the sound of his bones creaking, the juvenile, giving rise to a roar of anguish, was held down onto the white floor by her.

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Please stop. If you throw yourself with such manliness, it will be embarrassing—— Something like that."

Utilizing the Memories which thought lovingly of the juvenile, she held the juvenile down through sheer force. With her sadistic ■ fulfilled, she ended up relaxing the edges of her mouth. As if giving further satisfaction to that desire to afflict belonging to Louis's ■, frantically continuing to scream was Natsuki Subaru, as he twisted his body.

His form, earnestly calling for rage for the sake of someone else—— upon that, incidentally, Louis tilted her head.

Louis: "——Onii-san, why do you remember the Memories we had stolen?"

It had been an unnatural response.

Perceiving that whilst holding him down, Louis greatly twisted her neck.

The Memories eaten by Gluttony did not remain extant within the person concerned, the Names eaten by Gluttony did not remain extant within other people. That was because the Authority tore them off from the soul, which defined one's existence in the world.

The proper cleansing of the soul by Od Lagna, which was practiced in the Hall of Memories—— acting as its agent of its own accord, the Authority of Gluttony would usurp it in stealth.

Therefore, the Memories and Names snavelled by Gluttony did not remain present within anyone. Restrictively, though there had been ones who had only Memories or only Names stolen away, respective negative effects got applied.

If the Memories were stolen then said person, if the Name was stolen then other people, could no longer remember the person concerned. That could not be altered as long as the disposition of the soul remained within the protection of Od Lagna.

Yet, Natsuki Subaru did remember.

Did remember the ingredient, the soul which had been rendered naked, having Memories and Name both stolen.

Despite not being supposed to be able to remember it. Why, why, why——

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "We may have developed a bit of interest in onii-san now. Though it seems onii-chan will resent us."

Licking her lips, Louis dyed her cheeks with welling passion.

It was the opponent Ley had been attached to. To have that food snatched by someone uninvolved would surely make even Ley take befitting offense. Though Ley was actually quite soft and sweet to his little sister, the core tenet he had of listening to her selfishness was followed to the extreme, to the point they did not cross each other's appetite.

Appetite was, Gluttony was, the meaning of living for Louis, for Ley, and for Roy as well.

To have that be invaded arbitrarily could not let their ■ remain calm.

Louis: "If a dear platter that's been looked forward to is usurped, even if by a sibling, even killing them would be something that can't be helped, isn't it—— Ah, but, how irresistible, onii-san."

Whilst twisting his arms behind his back, she drew her lips closer to the nape of the juvenile pushed onto the floor.

It was something alike a spiritual form with no true substance. She could not sense the taste of sweat from him, who was in the state of mere soul. Though by nature, even pain was something similar to hallucination, something she did not intend to inform him of expressly.

Merely, the feelings of love she wanted to be in contact with erupted—— It seemed the owner of these Memories had been attached to this juvenile more than strongly. She could feel that strongly.

Louis: “Well, right now that goes for us.”

Should it even be a hearsay Memory, now that it had been stored like this, it belonged to her.

She could slightly understand Ley or Roy’s feeling of fear for Eclipse. She held no fear, but she did understand that the two’s premonition was correct—— Perhaps, if she continued like this,

Louis: “We, will certainly end up loving onii-san, isn’t it.”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “…Ehhh? Nauseating you say, that is so haaarsh. Because despite everything we’re still a girl, even though we mustered up courage and confessed, how cruel. Ah, you’re acting violently again. That won’t do, onii-san. It won’t hurt so please calm down, okay?”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “There’s no way we would hurt onii-san, you know. After all, he’s so beloved. That’s why you ought to calm your ■.”

No matter that she addressed him tenderly in an effort to calm him down, she faced opposition through frantic meager movement.

With the name in the Memories being called countless times, Louis had her entire body tremble with a sensation terribly ecstatic. This ecstasy, could only be tasted from a personage remembering one who had their Name stolen.

Namely, a flavor which Louis had never tasted.

——An unknown, sweet, sweet berry.

Louis: “——Natsuki Subaru.”

——What shall, your flavor be?

Louis: “Let’s eat.”

Seeking the answer to that *glacé* inquisitiveness of her ■, Louis tenderly licked the juvenile’s nape with her scarlet tongue. Calling his name, whilst tasting a lanuginous texture on the tip of her tongue, amiably, suavely, she licked.

In the significance of being fulfilled, what was termed as appetite lay similar to sexual desire.

Within such strengthening of affection for the person before her eyes, for even this unremitting appetite to be fulfilled, this must now be something alike copulation sought after sordidly.

People who valued each other mutually, blended within the existence known as Louis.

The sufficiency of that flavor, or how a saccharine a thing would it be——

Louis: “Thank you for the treat.”

Savoring it adequately as per her contentment, Louis conveyed her gratitude for the food through words.

That was the procedure of Gluttony’s meal—— invoking the name of the opponent whose Memories they wished to plunder, peeling off one section of the soul from the opponent’s flesh body, and eating that.

——What was termed as Memories, were things similar to sediments accumulated upon the soul.

It was also possible to adorn that with alluring words, such as feasts dished upon white platters.

However, should everything be exposed to its origin, what would be stretching before her would be the meaninglessness of adorning it beautifully. That was Louis’s perception in regards to the Authority of Gluttony, and Louis’s privilege being the ability to indulge in those souls.

With this, the entirety of what was associated with the soul of the juvenile before her eyes would become detailed.

What would then remain, would be for her to mix it with the Memories of the young girl already within Louis, then have her fill of what nature of chemical reaction it would cause——

Subaru: “——You, just now, what did you do to me.”

With a voice not supposed to be audible echoing, for the first time, Louis faced Natsuki Subaru himself.

Until then it had not seemed like they had been conversing. They had not faced each other as if facing each other. It had been naught but such a vague, drowning dream.

That was, for Louis too, an occasion of never-before-seen circumstances, abruptly getting tinged with colors.

What did he say just now?

Louis: "…Onii-san, it can't be, you remember us?"

A gaze charged with mighty, potent animosity, was the answer to Louis's doubt.

Louis: "——Ah."

That had been the moment Louis's slim, petite chest throbbed at a unmistakable high rate of pulsation.

△▼△▼△▼△

Why could he remain composed, in spite of having his Memories eaten?

Why was he glaring at Louis with such a look in his eyes, even now?

Why was Louis having her chest throb so intensely, despite such bewilderment?

Why, why, why, why, why——

Rather, that could have perhaps been an impetus deserving to be called premonition.

Louis: "Why, does onii-san remember us?"

Whilst glaring at the back of Natsuki Subaru's head under her eyes, holding him down, what Louis suspected at first was the possibility of the meal having failed.

For Louis and the others, there were a certain set of protocols absolutely necessary for the Authority of Gluttony.

The prime amongst them was to know the name of the opponent who was to be eaten, this was an indispensable element necessary for meddling with the soul of the opponent.

Therefore, in the case an alias were employed, the Authority was rendered powerless.

And, till now there had been a number of cases of having failed at the meal.

In those cases, the one to face the painful experience had always been either one of Ley or Roy, so not even once had Louis herself faced the painful experience, but——

Louis: “Onii-chan and nii-sama felt uncomfortable, as if it was painful, but…”

Louis stiffened her body, assuming there would be similar recoil upon her.

However, though she waited for a long time, there were no signs of that supposed recoil rushing upon Louis.

To begin with, new Memories were certainly being poured within Louis.

Louis: “Watchtower of the Sage, dear comrades, and there were Examinations…”

Murmuring indicating approval, as if carefully reading a single book within her mind, Louis became entranced with excavating through the new Memories.

Appending to the fact that there occurred no recoil, she had been successful in the extortion of Memories.

Referring to those Memories, she had comprehended what Natsuki Subaru and his comrades were doing, and even the sequence of events due to which he strayed into this Hall of Memories.

What remained, was for Natsuki Subaru’s specialness to be——

Louis: “——Huh.”

What words would be apt enough to describe the voluminousness of the impact Louis had received upon that moment?

Louis: "————"

Astounded due to that overwhelming thing, with the strength in her arms fading, she widened her eyes.

Exploiting that gap, the held-down Natsuki Subaru made his escape from Louis's arms. Taking distance at the same pace, he took a fighting pose nothing too impressive.

Though it was opposition rather comical and creasing up, Louis was not made to laugh at it.

There existed no leeway for her, to be laughing over that.

The impact of seeing something improbable, was stabbing through Louis's petite physique. That was——

Louis: "Why, are there Memories of the time of death?"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "No, that's not all. That's not all, onii-san. It's of course strange to have the Memories of the time of death. Plenty odd, you know. But, it's strange. After all…"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "After all, in the Memories we ate, there's nothing like the Memories of killing onii-san, yet onii-san has the Memories of being killed!"

That was, something abnormal.

What was occurring was a mysterious paradox that could not occur.

Ahh, the influence of Natsuki Subaru's Memories, the repertoire of words we should not be aware of originally increase. It was a paradox. Under the emergency due to the paradox, Schrödinger's Maxwell's Einstein was Nikola Tesla——![249]

Louis: "What is this!? What's the meaning of this!? Memories are different from delusion, you know!? The sediments stuck onto the soul can't be distorted or bent as how one pleases! That's why! This is the

[249] As you may imagine this makes also zero sense in Japanese. It's just a bunch of Engrish spam.

world onii-san witnessed! This is, the history onii-san tasted! This is, the story of onii-san, that only onii-san knows!"

Putting her fingers into her long, long golden-colored hair, Louis detonated her flaring impulse.

Not even for a single second could she remain without hurling it, rather than simply keeping the impulse to her own self. The very instant she did so, Louis Arneb erupted. Erupting and scattering across in all directions, her mind was divided into tiny fragments.

Louis: "New… newnewnewnewnewnewnewnew! New sense of values!"

It had been her meeting with that.

Her meeting with an article which surpassed all imagination, which Louis had not known, had not seen, had not thought of.

Her entire body transfixed by lightning, she was unable to think of anything else but that. What else could this be possibly called, should it not be called destiny? What name, should possibly be affixed to these emotions?

Louis: "Onii-san, could it be you're the same as us? Aren't you a Sin Archbishop?"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Though we have never met directly, Petelgeuse did say so! That the Factors were supposed to have been delivered. That since the positions of the Sins were filled, eventually, everyone would gather! And, that vacant seat is the seat belonging to onii-san… Belonging to *me*[250], is it not?"

Subaru: "————!!"

Louis: "Ahahahahahahahahaha! Don't get angry, don't get angry please, onii-san! Don't make us perplexed any more than this, onii-san! At this point, our mind is at its absolute limit, this small chest is about to burst open it, really hurts. Yes, yes, yes! Amazingamazingamazing!"

[250] More pronoun fuckery; here, Louis employs Subaru's usual pronoun of "俺", rather than her more common "私たち".

Tapping continuously, striking the temple of her own forehead with her fingers, Louis slurped on the Memories down to their very bones.

Difficult to believe. Unable to be believe in. The margin of having it believed, existed only in a fortuitous meeting with none but Gluttony.

Since Louis could jointly own the same Memories, she could believe in Natsuki Subaru's progression—— No, she could not believe in it, but savvy it as fact.

For this was the journey, Louis Arneb had traversed as well.

Louis: "Ah, what Pride!! Unfair… unfair unfair! Unfair unfair unfair unfair unfair unfair unfair unfair unfair unfair!! ——Mhm, wonderful! Onii-san, you really die again and again, again and again and again, isn't it!?"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Uwahhh, amazing! You're really dying! You're dying so miserably, onii-san! Again and again, you're dying without any method of succeeding, onii-san! Even something like this is possible, right, onii-san!"

A round of applause, a standing ovation, congratulations for taking birth[251]*.*

Gratitude for the miracle of meeting you, the train to future which shall advance with me.

Louis: "Welling forth *kanka*! Receiving stimulus and *henkaku*[252]! Onii-san, so you came from a place not here, not anywhere huh! Ahh, we can't even think, anymo… re."

Spouting sentiments without restraining their intensity, Louis, who was unreservedly immersed in it making no effort for resistance, suddenly recognized that potentiality—— No, she inclined her ears towards her inner voice.

[251] Lots of Engrish spam here as well, for the "standing ovation" and "congratulations".

[252] Two Engrish flips. First one means "inspiration (to someone)" (感化), originally "インスピレーション" (inspiration), second means "transformation/innovation" (変革), originally "イノベーション" (innovation).

To know a scenery unknown, to have taken birth in a world untold, all were finest quality full courses which would fulfill the hunger called the inquisitiveness of Louis's ■.

However, the specialty of Natsuki Subaru which was deserving of utmost attention was——

Louis: "——Memories of Death."

They were not supposed to exist. Absolutely unattainable, there existed the memories of Death and beyond.

Fundamentally different to something like near-death experiences, which were like cheap test tours. A phenomenon established due to the soul shattering, life slashed into a thousand fragments, the lifeline terminating in its true essence.

The other side of the Sanzu River[253], the border of the living world and the netherworld, which was impossible to return from. Neither swimming through it nor striding across it, the Memories of redoing life that were supposed to have been robbed away——

Louis: "——Return by Death."

That was how Louis had designated the greatest showpiece of the Memories blossoming within herself.

Accumulating the experiences of sundry Deaths as memories, that which could not be carved into Memories even once had been handed over to his next self as something certain.

And like that, Natsuki Subaru had surmounted all kinds of hardships.

Louis: "Amazing amazing, onii-san! Truly amazing! We've been moved deeply. We admire it from the bottom of our ■. You really can do something like that. Overcoming Death, with complete freedom!"

Subaru: "————"

[253] The Sanzu River (usually written "三途の川" but present here as "三途リバー", with the word "river" in Engrish), is the Buddhist equivalent of the River Styx from Greek mythology, forming the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead, over which souls go from one side to the other upon death. For more information, see here.

Louis: “No no, no need to be modest. We’re serious, you know? We really do find onii-san to be enviable. After all, something like the memories of Death, nobody possesses it no matter what.”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “Alsoalso, why is it so? Why are you all composed despite getting your Memories stolen by us? What kind of specialness is it? *Kakitome* of the soul? *Taihi*? Invariance? Makesnosense makesnosense![254]”

Within the struggling, writhing Natsuki Subaru existed numerous, multitudinous Memories of the time of death.

That was stimulation Louis, by no means, had managed to acquire. Furthermore, the power with the ability to stockpile Death, to die continuously without end, was the target of her jealousy.

Louis: “——We want it.”

She desired the power of Return by Death.

Not for it being capable of repeating Death. Naturally, that fresh stimulation was also a factor eternally captivating Louis, but what was further momentous was the ability to “redo”.

——Louis Arneb was searching for the greatest life.

And, the conclusion derived by Louis, having indulged in diverse lives, was that what was termed as the greatest life was neither being affluent, nor being loved by many, nor being blessed with a high status.

What was termed as the greatest life, referred to the life which “went as one wished”.

Anything and everything would occur as one believed, as one expected, as one wished.

Without any flaws, without any incompletion, without any irrationality, the perfect worldview.

She had always searched for a method for its realization. The answer to that was a darkness brought forth endlessly within Louis, but finally, she understood.

[254] Two Engrish flips again. First one means “writing down” (かきとめ), originally “save” (セーブ), second means “backup (of data)” (退避), originally “バックアップ” (backup).

Louis: "——It's Return by Death."

Should she procure that, she would be able to recover from conflicts, from failures.

Should she know what was to happen in the future, she would be able to deal with it. If only she could know what failure would occur, what irrationality would await, what incompletion would she come across.

Louis: "We can, live the greatest life——!"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "What should be done? What should be done in order to steal it? If onii-san's Return by Death is an Authority, then it can't be stolen by just eating. It's different from things that come attached with Memories and Names. Witch Factors are the antithesis of Od Lagna, after all! It won't come detached easily! That's why…"

That was why, was an Authority to be stolen, there was no choice but to steal the Witch Factor itself.

However, even Louis was unaware of a method to steal something to the extent of Witch Factors. Until now, never had she wished for an Authority belonging to other Sin Archbishops. That kind of a bunch was disgusting to even come in contact with. However——

Louis: "Onii-san, you're using, the Authority of the killed Petelgeuse…?"

The Unseen Hand present within the Memories had weakened in both numbers and range from the original, but it indubitably was the power employed by that lunatic. In other words, that was none but proof that several Witch Factors were being amassed in the interior of Natsuki Subaru.

If amassing Witch Factors was possible, then——

Louis: "We will absolutely, no matter what, get our hands on Return by Death. Onii-san's Authority is our hope. If that can be obtained, we will…"

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "We will, be able to live our own life!!"

Want to become, happy.

Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy.

*Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy.

However, that was not the case. That was not the case.

Louis's objective was not to plunder because she wanted to Return by Death, because she could amusingly live the greatest life by obtaining the Authority of Return by Death.

It was no good to have the bad habit of considering things in a hazardous, clinging fashion, because of having played the part of something like Sin Archbishop representing Gluttony for a long period of time. Problematic. Imprisoned by fixated notions. That was a cause of defeat.

It was simple. If it was not to plunder, but to obtain——

Louis: "——It'll be fine, if we just, become."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "It'll be fine, if we just become onii-san. If we become onii-san, and have him be consumed by the Authority of Gluttony… we can integrate Witch Factors. Since if it's onii-san, then they can be stocked."

Saying so, Louis plucked her cheeks with both her hands, continuously, forcefully, tempted into violence.

Not an endearing gesture, but excruciating, she did so wielding the intention to injure. For what purpose? To tear apart her flesh and blood, and dividing herself, that was the purpose.

Louis: "You know the Three Great Witchbeasts? It's said that those are monsters created by the owner of the Witch Factor long before us. We too, can do something similar. We didn't do that because there wasn't really any meaning in doing so… But, you see."

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "——If we think of doing it, then we can do anything."

——If we think of doing it, then we can do anything.

That was, what was called the monster of potentiality.

That was, what was called the potentiality of a pure existence prior to taking birth.

That was, one affixed with the destiny of living the greatest life hereafter in the future.

——That was, the destiny of the utmost joyful being, named Louis Arneb.

Louis & “Louis”: “——That is, the existence known as us.”

That slowly woven speech from Louis, when vocalized, overlapped.

The phenomenon of hearing the same voice doubled was not some kind of auditory hallucination or mishearing. That was in accordance with the occurrence happening, for there appeared two of the same people, with the same voice, with the same tone.

Louis: “Got surprised by onii-san’s Memories but, Arneb is a star belonging to the constellation of the Hare, huh? It was also astonishing that onii-san and the others were the ones to destroy the Great Rabbit too.”

“Louis”: “But, if that’s the case then it doesn’t become too much of a surprise? How come we multiplied, or is it onii-san’s great delight that cute Louis-chan multiplied? No, huh. No, eh. So onii-san is the type who doesn’t have sexual desire for little girls. Hmm, is that so?”

Observing the opponent who was frozen in place, with his eyes widened in astonishment, Louis linked her shoulders with the existence standing immediately beside her—— namely, the same Louis. Within this place, called the Hall of Memories which was separated from reality, Louis was merely an existence of a Witch Factor possessing no flesh body and a soul joint together. Aside from that, it rather seemed that the respective names of the three siblings corresponded with the Three Great Witchbeasts, though that, well, did not matter.

Anyhow, separating the Witch Factor into two, Louis Arneb multiplied by two.

This was a stunt that perhaps the duo of Ley and Roy, who feared losing their selves upon the utilization of Solar Eclipse, were not capable of. To know it was possible to duplicate oneself, also tied together with forfeiting the true essence of one’s real self.

However, that did not apply to Louis, whose self had been established as vague from start.

It was possible to have one Louis, two Louis, and so on.

With this, Louis Arneb could obtain Natsuki Subaru's Authority.

Subaru: "————"

Louis: "Eh? What?"

The juvenile, the receptacle of the Witch Factor, declared some words.

Upon glancing at the juvenile, aside from the glamour called Return by Death, simply feelings of love welled up. Finding that annoying, Louis discarded the Memories emerging to the surface.

Upon peeling them off her own soul, she discarded, abandoned them with the notion of them being useless.

——No, that was not simply a notion. In truth, they were indeed useless now.

All the Memories had been mere fillers until the greatest life was discovered, naught but side dishes. However, Louis Arneb had finally reached her full course.

Louis & "Louis": "——If we think of doing it, then we can do anything."

That was why, she would tread onto this path.

Eating into Natsuki Subaru, from the interior. Chewing the eaten-into Natsuki Subaru, from the exterior, sparing not a single bit—— Louis Arneb, would obtain Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: "——You'll ■■■■."

Until the very end of the end, the receptacle continued speaking something.

However, what had it been saying, something like that no longer held any relevance. Licking the sediments stuck onto the soul with her tongue, Louis inherited the Memories.

And, within the receptacle which had forgotten anything and everything, Louis personally had herself appended to the Witch Factor. As for the rest——

Louis: "As for the rest, it's fine to simply wait for completion."

Unremittingly waiting in the Hall of Memories, was something she had grown all too accustomed to.

Problem lied in the usage of the Memories. There was a scheme for stealing Memories once again from an opponent who had already been eaten once. The gourmet Authority did not deem a menu of the same name, of the same taste, as a separate article in its judgement.

That was why, there present was a need to alter the flavor from the soul.

Into an article separate to such an extent that it was not possible to recall that it had once been atop Gluttony's, Louis's tongue.

Anticipating it would prove itself to be the taste of the finest quality, that was what Louis Arneb fervidly awaited.

Hoping it achieved completion into the greatest, utmost, supreme dish.

Looking forward to that moment, whilst licking her lips, and longing——

△▼△▼△▼△

???: "So. Did you get to see what you wanted to see—— Louis Arneb."

Louis: "Huh?"

Upon the sudden accost, Louis, who had gained awakening of her consciousness, rounded her eyes.

Blinking a few times, she made certain of her location. White environs, white ground and white skies, standing within the world blanketed white, Louis had been making a stupefied expression.

Louis: "————"

Having her hand touch her face, making contact, she made certain of the sensation.

Since there was no mirror in this place, she could not take a look, but this sensation was irrefutably her own face. With there not being even any moderate amusements in this place, speaking of things touchable, only her own face, own body counted as one.

Therefore, she had touched her face to an extent one would grow sick of touching it. Therefore, upon touching her face she had grown sick of touching, she could immediately know in what state her face, her body was.

Just as before. Yes, just as before—— This was, Louis's own body.

???: "Did you get to see what you wanted to see, huh?"

Slowly, stupefied, making certain of herself was Louis.

With that behavior reaching a point where it could pause, abruptly, the accost was then repeated once again. Lifting her face, Louis looked at the personage who had been standing before her, in front of her eyes all along.

Rather short black hair and stabbing *sanpaku* eyes, with short legs for such a long torso, wearing a shabby appearance. It was the boy.

His name was Natsuki Subaru. The existence Louis herself had become one with as a Witch Factor, and——

Louis: "——Ah."

——And, the being of unimaginable insanity, wielding the Authority which had the ability to Return by Death.

Louis: "N-NOOOOOoooooooOOOOOooOOoOOoooo——!!"

Louis opened her mouth, and screamed.

As long as the strength remained, as long as the possibility remained, with complete devotion, she screamed.

Should she have not done that, she would be crushed by the pressure. By the terror, by the menace, by the despair.

She would get snared in the insanity of a lunatic, who repeated and resumed continuing Death time after time.

Louis: “Don’t want to die! We don’t want to die! Hate it, hate it hate it hate it hate it, hate it hate it hate it hate it hate it hate it! Hate it! Hate iiit!!”

Swinging her head, collapsing onto the bare ground, so Louis frantically appealed while drawing back.

By assimilating with that existence, Louis had personally experienced Death. She had tasted it. By being taken in by the soul who practiced Return by Death by her own volition, she had experienced Return by Death firsthand, which turned back even time.

The memories of Death that had been incomplete as merely Natsuki Subaru’s Memories.

After all, memories were naught but memories. The sensational impact of never returning again upon letting go even once of that instant, of that juncture, of that moment, could never be obtained.

That had been why she had thirsted for that. She had thirsted for what flavor Death had.

Even if Death had been something less vivid than what Louis had expected, using the Authority that went by the name of Return by Death, she could gain sufficient change with the right to walk a life in which redoing was a possibility.

That was what she had believed—— Until she herself, tasted Death, rather.

Louis: “Something like that… something like that, can never be endured! That anguish! Sense of loss! No way can it be endured! Impossible! Impossible impossible! Absolutely impossible! Hate iiit!”

Not even once, had she possessed a way to die comfortably.

Not even once, had she felt Death to be luscious.

Not even once, had she wished to die on her own volition.

Natsuki Subaru had tasted that greater than twenty times, reenacting it.

Louis: “Someone who can withstand that, is not human! A monster! A monsteeer!”

She could not. No way she could.

Louis had indulged in a great number of lives, affronted all kinds of souls, and had searched a life of her own.

She believed she had possessed the right, the privilege, to do so.

That was why, she stretched her hands even towards the soul of Natsuki Subaru—— and in consequence, had gotten her naive ■ shattered. Because——

Louis: "——The human heart, cannot withstand something like itself dyiiing!!"

Want to become, happy.

Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy.

Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Want to become happy. Wanted—— to become happy.

Wanted, to become happy.

That was the wish Louis Arneb had envisaged all along, for the whole time.

Trampling upon all aspects of everything, she possessed the right to exercise her power for the purpose of acquiring the greatest life. Louis had remained believing so without any pangs of conscience whatsoever, until this day.

That, that, that, that premise, crumbled.

Wanted to become, happy. But, right now, the wish right now is different.

Louis: "Don't want to die."

Don't want to die.

Don't want to die. Don't want to die. Don't want to die.

*Don't want to die don't want to die don't want to die

*to die don't want to die don't want to die don't want

Arc 6 Chapter 76 - The Hell Bearing the Name of Oneself

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 3 “Louis Arneb”, Parts 3-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

Subaru: “————”

——With the young girl who had experienced Return by Death sobbing with her hands on her head before his eyes, Natsuki Subaru intently stared at his own palm.

It was not as if he was feeling hurt after having been called a monster, after having been spoken ill of.

That he was crazy. That it was impossible to endure, he agreed with those notions as well.

Subaru himself, had died countless times until now.

He was aware of something as basic as those experiences being unordinary. But he had simply gritted his teeth, and endured it.

Believing with all his heart that it would be better for him to suffer than having someone aside himself, a friend or an acquaintance, people whose names and faces he did not know, his precious comrades or the people he loved, die. That was——

Subaru: “——Yeah, I sure am amazing, right, Natsuki Subaru.”

Tightly clenching the fist he had been gazing at, Subaru sang his own praises from the bottom of his heart.

He had been commended, through loose-lipped logic impossible to be held true. Such words had been used as if to console oneself, or for encouraging oneself.

However, the singing of his own praises just now, had been different.

The Memories and "real experiences" which had observed the existence named Natsuki Subaru terribly objectively, were commending the path he himself had walked until now.

Subaru: "Dang. I'm unexpectedly a pretty big deal, huh."

And that was something which "Natsuki Subaru", who had lost his Memories and had returned to the starting point of being summoned into another world, and ultimately reached this point after taking a deep read of the Books of the Dead, could also be told.

Starting from being ignorant with regards to the different world, accumulating personal experiences of Death sufficient to equal the single year Subaru had lived through, he had returned without letting his heart shatter into pieces, impressively so.

Thanks to that, the lost Memories and the Memories thereafter had been unified.

Subaru: "Meili and Shaula both were entrusted to me, I'll take responsibility for them."

Meili, for whom murder had become a habit, had locked herself into a dark future.

Shaula, who had been liberated from a vain wait which had lasted for four-hundred years, wished to continue the blessed present.

Subaru: "Ram and Julius, both of them sure act unreasonably. For those two to be doing that, that's quite a feat."

Ram, who already knew the best possible option, and displayed prudence more reliable than anyone else's.

Julius, who had lost those to turn to, yet embraced faith and resumed holding the sword.

Subaru: "Beatrice and Echidna, I've really been a bother to them as well. Geez, I'm such a…"

Beatrice, who devotedly supported Subaru, had noticed the limits of his heart before anyone else.

Echidna, who was utmost suspicious regarding Subaru's amnesia, had granted him forgiveness at her end.

Subaru: "————"

And, no matter if he lost his Memories, no matter how many times he would redo, he had ultimately returned to the path of being drawn towards her.

He wanted to do that. He must do that. He could not think of any other path.

That was just the extent to which she was——

Subaru: "——EMT."

With love and certain tranquility on his lips, Subaru raised his face.

And looked at Louis, who still had her face covered, shivering.

Subaru: "Hey."

Louis: "Eekh!"

Subaru: "…You're too scared."

Subaru scratched his cheek with a single finger upon her being excessively frightened by a single call.

She was a young girl with an outward appearance which could unobjectionably be called young. The form of that young girl shivering in fear, desperately rejecting the world, was a sight heavy to the chest. It seemed she had been endowed with something akin to fleeting fragility which would make one thoughtlessly extend a hand to her, by birth.

Surely, she had attained the nature to undo the opponent's vigilance, slipping through it—— That could perhaps be, a crystal pure like a child that had been coercively refined.

That Louis Arneb, who did not know of the world, was like an innocent, pure child. However——

Subaru: "——Louis Arneb, you lose."

——Natsuki Subaru would not forgive Louis Arneb, who was sobbing like a child.

Louis: "————"

Louis widened her eyes, frozen, upon the proof of defeat being thrown right before her.

Whilst witnessing fear fill her eyes like ink spilled on a white sheet, Subaru's heart yet remained peaceful like the calm at sea.

The world was not filled with problems that could be ignored simply by not knowing. And the deeds Louis or her siblings had committed were countless inhuman, demonic atrocities.

It was not as if she had not gotten a chance to know. Through the Memories of others, she'd certainly had a chance to come in contact with human emotions, likes and dislikes and learn from them.

However, what she had absorbed from them was not something akin to affection for others, but a further dusky, grisly desire, and the conduct of trampling upon and spitting on the effortful lives of others.

Perhaps the fault was her teachers'. Her elder brothers, had been bad role models of her life.

However, it had been her decision to never use any chance to return from the mistaken path.

Subaru: "You may know as well, if you were a part of me. But the ranks which you all… you Sin Archbishops name yourselves, has something in common with the Seven Deadly Sins. For *chuunibyou*[255] purveyors of *seiyougo*[256] there's the Seven Deadly Sins, but the Seven Heavenly Virtues also exist, something closely related to it."

The Seven Deadly Sins, Pride, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, Lust, and Greed.

And the Seven Heavenly Virtues, Chastity, Humility, Temperance, Patience, Diligence, Charity, and Kindness[257].

If the Seven Deadly Sins were karma impossible to be sundered from humans as long as they lived, then these were seven conventions which must not be forgotten in order for humans carrying the burden of those sins to live with others.

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[255] "Chuuni", also known as "chuunibyou" (中二病), or literally translated as "middle two disease" or, alternatively, "middle-school second-year disease". Well-known term to describe kids in middle school who have delusions of grandeur, like special powers. It even has its own Wikipedia page!

[256] Engrish flip. Means "western language" (西洋語), originally "ロマンワード" (roman word).

[257] The Seven Heavenly Virtues stand somewhat in opposition to the Seven Deadly Sins in Christian theological canon. For more information on how each of them relates to each other, see the second table here.

Because they respected that, humans could live with other humans.

Subaru: “But, you all… You, violated that.”

That was why, the Sin Archbishops, why Louis Arneb had become an unforgivable great evil.

Louis: “Eek, eek, eek…”

The frightened, curled-up Louis was struck with Subaru’s words, shivering as if she had experienced agony.

The slightest effort of others, of the world, connected to fear. Subaru was also aware of that sensation.

Having tasted the other-worldly sensation called Return by Death, in a situation of not knowing how to surmount the obstacle however much one may undergo Death, even the sound of dry leaves swaying in the breeze seemed fatal to life.

Because he remembered that feeling akin to his soul being frozen, Subaru closed his eyes. And,

Subaru: “Louis Arneb, you lose.”

Louis: “————”

Subaru: “So, recognize that and release anything and everything.”

Once again, Subaru repeated her defeat such that she could hear it herself. On top of that, he pushed a firm demand toward the young girl, who remained silent upon hearing that.

The return of Subaru’s own Memories was due to the chance meeting between Natsuki Subaru, who had lost his memories, and Natsuki Subaru of the moment immediately previous to his memories being robbed—— since his advance through the different world had been reenacted in the Books of the Dead, he had been able to restore his own memories in the form of tracing them back.

In the form of re-experiencing the stolen Memories by utilizing the Books of the Dead.

And fulfilling the unification of Subaru before and after losing Memories, the result was the successful second advent of Natsuki Subaru.

As its byproduct, Louis, who had entered Subaru in the form of a Witch Factor, had been forced out as a foreign substance. However, Subaru had witnessed, with his own eyes, her self-indulgent treatment of the stolen Memories, freely bringing them out and peeling them off.

If that was possible, then a method to save the people who'd had their Memories, their Names robbed, would be——

Subaru: "If we think of doing it, then we can do anything. That's what you said, right? Then…"

From being conceited and bragging about her own abilities, she had even succeeded in a stunt like splitting her Witch Factor into two.

Since she had achieved that, then surely it was not impossible for her to cancel out the effects of her own Authority. If that, that alone, could come true, then perhaps——

——It would be possible to recover the people who got their Memories and Name stolen, to recover Rem.

Subaru: "If so, release all the people you've eaten up until now. If you do that…"

Louis: "…Do that, then what?"

Subaru: "————"

Subaru articulated powerfully, but Louis shortly interrupted the voice he rose.

Louis remained on white floor in the posture of pulling her knees towards herself, making her long, long golden hair spreading out on the floor blanket herself, as she glared at Subaru through the gaps of her hair.

What dwelled in her eyes, was the sole unquestionable hue of fear.

Louis: "Do that, then what?"

Repeating, Louis piled up the same question yet again.

Subaru had been caught off guard by her retort for a moment, but got a hold of himself immediately after she displayed her stance of conversation. Far better than her not talking due to fear.

He must accept the words head-on, and fumble around for a compromise plan that could change the situation.

Subaru: “Release the great number of people you’ve eaten. If the Names return, then even the honor of the people who’ve already died can be restored. The people who are alive, can even reunite with their families. If you do that, then I’ll let you…”

Louis: “——Off the hook, you say? If we do that, then onii-san will let us off the hook? Off the hook, you say?”

His words interrupted yet again, Subaru felt daunted.

Viewing that reaction of Subaru’s, Louis let out a “Haa” and opening her mouth bearing sharp fangs,

Louis: “That can’t be, isn’t it! That isn’t possible!”

Energetically lifting her face, Louis shouted with a blazing glint in her eyes.

Her two eyes glaring at Subaru, they immutably remained soaked in fear, twinkling darkly. With those dark twinkles in her eyes, Louis forcefully rocked her body back and forth,

Louis: “It isn’t! It really isn’t, it isn’t after all, it indeed isn’t, we’re telling you it isn’t, as it isn’t, as we know it isn’t, that’s why! Onii-san will not let us off the hook! Absolutely certainly! After all…”

Subaru: “————”

Louis: “Onii-san, destroys his enemies! Absolutely crushes them until the very end of the end! Without any exception! Completely thoroughly! Closes it with a *kanpekina shioi*[258]! He can do that! Then there’s no way he wouldn’t do that! There’s no point in him not doing that!”

As if having heard a first-class joke, Louis ended her silence and let her emotions explode.

And to Subaru, Louis’s form as she had her outburst was visible as being terribly distant, minute.

[258] Engrish flip. Means “flawless match” (完璧な試合), originally “パーフェクトゲーム” (perfect game).

Louis's facial expression was disordered, trying to laugh, trying to be angered, trying to be doleful, and baffled by the notation of fear not present in any of those, she was perplexed and was imploring.

Louis: "————"

The gateways of all of Louis's surging emotions, all directly connected to "fear".

Regardless of whether they had begun with delight, rage or sadness. Knowing that all would ultimately lead to "fear", for what should she be delighted, be enraged, be saddened.

Even if she were to believe, that conclusion led to "fear" as well.

Subaru was more than sufficiently aware of the ingrained nature of Louis's rejection. Cursing the entirety of the world, being flung into a storm of suspicion and distrust, becoming trapped in a sensation of being forbidden from taking the slightest movement.

That was, the hell named oneself which Natsuki Subaru had also experienced.

What had pulled Subaru out of that hopeless hell was surely the fact there had been someone who held his hand, and that warmth had never let go of Subaru.

That was, the silver-haired young girl who had saved Subaru's life, his heart when he had first arrived in the different world.

That was, the young girl in a dress who had strived to protect Subaru when he had been betrayed by anything and everything.

That was, the blue-haired young girl who had injured Subaru with kindness when he had he sought to abandon everything.

——That was, the reason why Natsuki Subaru had remained without being imprisoned in hell.

Subaru: "————"

That foundation of heart was not possessed by Louis Arneb, who was drowned in fear before his eyes.

That was why she did not possess the ability to conquer Fear—— She could never think of Return by Death other than being a nightmarish curse of being dragged into an inescapable hell.

Though quite a clichéd expression, humans were unable to live by themselves. That was why, for her to be saved, she, who was caged in "fear", it was necessary for someone to extend their hand to her.

Someone offering their hand, just as Subaru had been offered once. However——

Subaru: "——I, will not save you."

——Subaru would not extend his hand, to Louis Arneb.

Louis: "——Ah."

Subaru: "I, will not save you. Neither will I feel sorry for you."

Louis Arneb, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, the blasphemer of souls standing in the white world.

Not matter how sweet an appearance, no matter how miserable and transient an ambience, no matter how luring an attitude of craving being sheltered by adults were she to possess, Subaru would not forgive her.

The Sin Archbishops had committed sins difficult to forgive—— That was the conclusion, Natsuki Subaru had derived.

Subaru: "I'm sure that, no matter what I say, it'll never prove to be salvation for you in the first place."

Louis: "Eek."

Louis's rounded eyes were filled with naught but terror toward Subaru.

In this place, though only Subaru could understand the fear she bore, the very reason for her fear was Subaru himself. In other words, her labyrinth could not possibly be unravelled.

And upon Subaru's head-on declaration that he would not save her, that he detested her, Louis stabbed her claws into the shapeless white world and whilst desperately distancing herself away from Subaru——

Louis: “We know… We know onii-san’s ploy! We were onii-san after all! That’s why, we know what onii-san is going to do… However, we won’t let you!”

Subaru: “You…”

Louis: “Return what was eaten!? Absolutely never! After all, this is our lifeline! If we lose this, then onii-san can kill us! As long as this isn’t returned, onii-san won’t kill us! It’s the other way around, the other way around, completely the other way around! In order to not be killed by onii-san, we cannot return this! That’s why, you knooow!!”

Howling with a loud voice, Louis turned her palm towards Subaru. It was not as if something was being fired from the fair palm held out. However, Louis’s aim materialized in a different form.

Subaru’s field of vision languidly distorted into white, and a change was yielded in the Hall of Memories. It commenced constricting the world, having detected the presence of a foreign substance, seeking to eliminate it.

As a result, Subaru’s existence was extracted——

Louis: “Enough, we don’t want to be in the same place as onii-san for even a second! Impossible in terms of physiology! Impossible in terms of life! Impossible in terms of destiny, you see! That’s why, disappear! The ones who’ll eat onii-san, will be onii-chan and nii-sama! Either of them can do however they please! No thanks from our side!”

Louis’s decision, infuriatingly enough, had been the best possible option for her.

Banishing Subaru from the Hall of Memories and sending him back to reality. And entrusting opposing him to her siblings Ley and Roy instead of herself.

If the Sin Archbishops of Gluttony could choose to share or not to share a meal, then Louis would be able to part ways from the worst platter named Natsuki Subaru. Whether her siblings would bear the same anguish as herself or not, that itself was something her current self did not know.

Subaru: “——Guh.”

It was difficult to hold his ground.

With not a single thing to latch onto, and with even the ground to stand firm on becoming vague, Subaru was hopelessly the weaker side in this Hall of Memories.

Subaru: “If you, don’t like me doing it… Then if you settle this, by yourself…”

Louis: “We won’t go along with that! Even if you try to make us kill you, it’s futile! You intend to take us out through Return by Death! We won’t let you! Onii-chan and nii-sama will eat away onii-san, completely! That’s, the condition for our victory!!”

Unraveling her fangs, Louis scowled at Subaru as he attempted to stay his ground. He could no longer oppose her will. Comprehending that, he let in a deep inhale.

Afterwards, Subaru’s black eyes directly pierced through Louis——

Louis: “——Eek.”

Subaru: “If your siblings, are your final rope to rely on, then I understand—— I’ll slash that rope and make you pay. You’d better remember this, Louis Arneb.”

With a single finger pointed towards the frightened, cowering Louis, he resumed.

Subaru: “Everything distressful, everything painful, bear all of it by yourself—— Don’t run away, from the Memories.”

Humiliation and repentance, were all Memories necessary to shape one’s current self.

Its entirety had become food for the human named Natsuki Subaru, and the Natsuki Subaru constructed by its entirety had reached this point after having stockpiled many a Death.

If Natsuki Subaru was amazing, then that was because humiliation and repentance let him be so.

Subaru: “With that being said, I don’t really want even a part of that shame.”

That was what Subaru whispered whilst being expelled out from a space to its edge, which did not exist in the world, with his field of vision turning white as if nothing had been there.

And, the Hall of Memories came untied——

△▼△▼△▼△

And, within the Hall of Memories wherein the form of the dreadful lunatic had been erased, Louis Arneb took in a deep, deep shivering inhale, and confirmed her own pure life.

Louis: “Ah, ah, ahhh…”

Her throat, shivering, her lungs, shivering, her heart, shivering, her soul, shivering.

Even Louis, who had indulged in every possible variety of Memories, could not comprehend an existence that repulsive. What was truly frightening about that thing, was its inconceivable spirit.

Louis: “Wh, y…”

Whether she could remain as per ordinary, she did not know.

Louis had become a part of that thing, and prior to that had eaten that thing’s Memories thoroughly down to its roots. Slowly crunching on the Memories without exception, she had masticated them.

That deed itself was roundabout, as if peeling off the layers of an onion’s skin one-by-one, a code of action separating that which yielded new life upon each instance of Death into greater than twenty sections.

Before having experienced Return by Death, that deed of dividing those Memories into several portions then eating them was something that made her heart pound with the notion of it being a new experience, but now all she found was incomprehensible fear.

In the first place, why could the Memories prior to the occurrence of being summoned into another world or whatever not be robbed?

Originally, the power of the Authority of Gluttony was supposed to eat away the Memories of the subject until the moment of birth in their entirety. Yet, what had been able to be robbed from that thing had merely been the Memories of this one year.

As if Od Lagna did not assess the Memories previous to that, abhorred them, or otherwise——

???: “——Listenlisten, um, isn’t this a bit different from what was supposed to be?”

Louis: “————”

Suddenly, a voice echoed in the Hall of Memories supposed to have been left alone, and Louis turned around, astonished. However, her doubts were immediately dispelled.

The one who stood before Louis’s line of sight, who had turned back, was——

Louis: “Us…”

“Louis”: “That’s right, us. Because we got the short end of the stick, it’s us who’d been waiting here in vain. Which one will *asobu* the trial version of the greatest life by becoming onii-san, was the *kyougi* environment properly arranged[259]? Came here to report that, is it?”

Whilst saying so, smiling at Louis was an existence exactly the same as her—— “Louis”.

Dividing the Witch Factor originally supposed to be one into two, having segregated the soul despite being the same personage, in the utmost correct sense, another one of herself.

The greatest factor which made that possible must be that Louis did not fear the deterioration of her self, an existence of mere soul devoid of a flesh body.

That “Louis”, who was one more of oneself, had not been shared that personal experience unlike Louis. That was why, Louis found the genuinely smiling form of “Louis”, to be unordinarily distant.

“Louis”: “——? What happened, us. Making such an expression, huh. First of all, what about onii-san? Being here means, you got into this place by reading the Book of the Dead again, no?”

Louis: “————”

“Louis”: “Besides, what’s with this being all crouched since earlier? Why are you curled up? Heyheyhey, the goal was accomplished in full, right? Though we failed on this end, we were supposed to have fulfilled

[259] Two Engrish flips. First means “(to) play” (遊ぶ), originally “プレイ” (play), second means “競技” (game/match), originally “プレイ” (play).

the role, isn't it. Amazing amazing, got in pretty cleanly huh. Onii-san geez, didn't take notice at all. Of the us inside of himself!"

Clasping her hands energetically, "Louis" reminisced the forbidden tryst.

Of course, without it even being mentioned, Louis was aware of that affair.

It referred to back when the Hall of Memories had been connected to at the time she had been thinking of investigating the way of capturing the atrocious swordsman, Reid Astrea. "Louis" then once again came in contact with that thing, which had forgotten anything and everything, with the intent of eating that thing including Louis, who was a Witch Factor, had the circumstances permitted.

Though it was an experiment to see if that thing's Authority, including the integrated Witch Factor, could possibly be successfully plundered by doing that, it had failed due to an unexpected hindrance.

She had surely never mused that she would be made to taste a counterattack by one of the eaten Memories.

However, reflecting on it now, had the hindrance not entered there, then Louis might have become one with that thing by this time. With that thing——

"Louis": "Heyhey, what happened, us! Talk about more stuff, let us hear it! Saw it, right? Heard it, right? Scented it, right? Touched it, right? Tasted it, right? ——Natsuki Subaru's Authority, eh!"

Louis: "——Don't mention that thing's name!!"

"Louis": "——Hk."

Resuming her merry words, "Louis" stretched her hand. The moment that arm attempted to touch her own shoulder, Louis shook off the arm in accompaniment of exasperation.

Violently, powerfully, with as much rejection as possible, she did, to the arm of her literal other half.

"Louis": "…Huh?"

Naturally, unbeknownst to the meaning behind her other half's action, bafflement was yielded forth in "Louis's" facial expression.

However, Louis did not possess the leeway to look back onto that expression of “Louis’s”. Louis hugged the shoulder “the other one” had tried touching, and stepped backwards whilst shaking her head in rejection.

Louis: “No! Nonono! Don’t touch us! Don’t come near!”

She was astonished, by her own cognizance.

However, it was her own sensation. It would not turn traitor, like the hell named oneself.

She comprehended. “Louis” before her eyes, who possessed the same face as herself, who had undergone the same experiences as herself.

The existence supposed to understand her soul—— at present, it was someone else for Louis.

It was unknown, what others would do. They would not protect Louis.

They could become Louis’s cause of death. Baleful enemies who would naught but kill Louis, who did not want to die.

Louis: “Don’t come! Don’t come near don’t come near don’t come near don’t come near! Don’t come close! Don’t touch uuus!”

“Louis”: “————”

Hugging her own body, she was unable to do anything but react in exactly the same way as when she had confronted that thing.

For Louis, who had continued molding her self through the Memories of others in this space devoid of the freedom to even look at a mirror, the sense of being something foreign that she felt towards “Louis”, who possessed the same face as herself, was stronger than towards that imprudent other person.

Witnessing Louis repeat denial and rejection like this, “Louis” reciprocatively shifted her gaze along with the hand that had been shaken off. And,

“Louis”: “Huh? What’s with that.”

Pertaining to Louis's rejective response, "Louis" clenched her hand that had been shaken off. She then looked down onto Louis with a terribly thirstful voice, biting and clanking her fangs.

"Louis": "What's with that. What's with that what's with that, what does this mean? With what purpose, with what idea, with what plan with what thought, hey!?"

Louis: "Eeeek."

"Louis": "This is different from what was supposed to be! What happened, us!? What's, with that reaction! Attitude! Response!"

The rejected "Louis" enraged, she closed in towards the huddled Louis. Crouching down before Louis, who knelled her throat upon the vigor, "Louis" grasped the hair of her cowering other half.

Subsequently making her raise her face through sheer force, the two with the same faces glared into each other at a distance that their breaths entangled.

"Louis": "It sure is strange. Strange, how strange, isn't it strange, pretty strange, it is strange, as it's strange, quite strange, as it's too strange, as we're saying it's strange!!"

Louis: "————"

"Louis": "What about the strategy? The plan went well, didn't it? The plan was to become a Factor and get inside onii-san, and put wickedness to work, wasn't it? It was a job really well done. Onii-san was frightened, after all! Onii-san completely thought, that "Natsuki Subaru" was the closest person to him!"

Louis made no response to the plan which "Louis" recited and its progress.

The truth was, Louis and "Louis's" plans had progressed smoothly. Louis had experienced Return by Death inside Subaru and stimulated the separation of Subaru and "Natsuki Subaru" by putting wickedness to work.

And whilst staying behind in the Hall of Memories, "Louis" would eat Subaru who had differentiated himself from "Natsuki Subaru", and make the Authority her own belonging. A single step had remained.

And even if that had not went well——

“Louis”: “——No matter how many times, tens of times, hundreds of times! The arrangement was to challenge until the Authority of Return by Death has been looted, isn’t it! What’s wrong after failing a bit! It’ll be fine by stealing onii-san’s Memories again and trying again no matter how many times it takes. Let’s exchange each other’s roles and challenge, no matter how many times how many times it takes! Failures, can be recovered from!”

The one to assimilate as a Witch Factor, and the one to stand by in the Hall of Memories, she had intended to accomplish the complete extortion of the Authority by exchanging roles regardless of how many times it took, without getting tired of it. And yet——

“Louis”: “——And yet, to do something like rejecting us, what happened!”

Louis: “NOOOOoooo——!”

“Louis”: “Woah!”

With strength poured into the arm which had grasped her hair, Louis gave rise to a screech in agony and fear. Afterwards she shoved the chest of “Louis” who was before her eyes, making her other half rumble in pain and fall onto her back.

Mutually glaring at each other with eyes of disbelief, a painful silence fell upon the white world. And, whilst Louis remained silent, “Louis” widened her eyes and,

“Louis”: “It can’t be… You’re aiming to monopolize the Authority?”

Louis: “————”

“Louis”: “Since the Authority of Return by Death was obtained successfully, you’re aiming to erase onii-san immediately and enjoy it by yourself? Leaving us as-is, too.”

Louis: “T-that’s wrong!”

Louis bellowed before the frozen “Louis”, who had painted a picture of repulsive misgivings in astonishment, in shock. That was not true at all. It was improbable. She had not thought in the slightest bit, to monopolize it.

Something like this, if it were possible to throw it away, then she wished to throw it away. However, she could not do so.

For these were the Memories of nobody, but “Louis Arneb”. Oneself’s own Memories were impossible to be erased. Impossible to be stolen. Impossible to be taken in and out.

???: “Everything distressful, everything painful, bear all of it by yourself—— Don’t run away, from the Memories.”

Louis: “Eek.”

So she had been told by that thing just prior.

What was experienced by oneself, what path was walked by oneself, could not be erased. Having certainly taken birth within Louis, that was the history of “Louis Arneb” herself.

“Louis”: “This isn’t a joke! Something like this, as if it can be excused…!”

She had wanted to become happy. She had wanted to attain a joyful life that was hers alone.

However, the life solely belonging to her which she had attained in an unexpected form smashed Louis’s ■—— her “heart”, into pieces, and had wounded her to an irrecoverable extent.

“Louis” was unable to comprehend, Louis fearing the wounds and abrasion of her heart.

“Louis”: “As if we’ll let someone like you, monopolize our means to become happy!”

Louis: “That’s wrong! That’s wrong that’s wrong that’s wrong that’s wroooong! That’s not it! That is not it! That’s definitely not iiit!”

“Louis”: “As if we can believe that! We never thought, that we’d be betrayed by us. As expected of us, isn’t it, us! That’s right. We get it, we get it. Hmhm, we do get it!”

Louis: “No! You don’t get it at all! Don’t get it at all! Don’t get our feelings at all!”

“Louis”: “No, do get it indeed! After all, it’s us. That’s right. If it’s for the sake of becoming happy, then we’d be willing to do anything, and must do anything! Joyfulness, is something which keeps on keeps on declining by the slightest thing!”

“Louis” bounced and joined her hands before her slim chest. And with a magnificent, broad smile, she directed a sidelong glance towards Louis who articulated her rejection in a tearful voice.

“Louis”: “What if, we carelessly schemed wickedness? If that’s done to us by us, who have attained Return by Death, then no matter how much the struggle we can never win, isn’t it! Amazing! Really put thought into it, isn’t it!”

Louis: “Don’t want to die! We don’t want to die! Don’t want to die don’t want to die don’t want to diiiiiie!”

“Louis”: “Don’t say such utterly obvious lies! Don’t want to die? Why? How come? If it’s unneeded, then hand it over to us! What a filthy desire to monopolize… Can’t even think that it’s us!”

Louis: “————”

From “Louis’s” words, she was being repudiated being the same existence.

At that instant, Louis felt like she heard the note of something inside of her thirsting, cracking, shattering. She did know, what had been present inside of her which shattered.

Though she did not know——

“Louis”: “——Natsuki Subaru belongs to us. This, thieving cat.”

Despite not knowing what that thing was whatsoever, it was condescendingly called as a belonging.

Even though the only one who truly comprehended what thing, was only herself, how arbitrary a thing to say.

——The only one who truly comprehended that thing, was herself alone.

Louis: “——The only one who understands Natsuki Subaru is us. You, foolish girl.”

That thing was fearsome. That thing was repulsive. That thing, was abhorrent. That was why——

“Louis”: “Let us taste it too——!!”

“Louis” pounced, advancing in order to purloin the Memories which made Louis, Louis.

To hand that over, would signify the Death of Louis Arneb.

Signify Death—— Signifying, the world witnessed by that thing.

Louis: “Ah, AHHHHHH——!!”

Screamed. Screamed. Screaming, screaming, screaming, she screamed.

Continuing to scream, whilst screaming, whilst resuming screaming, whilst continuing to raise a screaming voice——

Louis: “——Don’t want to die.”

An exceedingly fierce, meaningless conflict commenced in the Hall of Memories.

A conflict with nobody watching, nobody interested.

Commenced, and ended—— A conflict, devoid of victors.

△▼△▼△▼△

???: “——Ice Brand Arts!!”

The instant those words were fired, she gripped the sensation born within her palm tight, and swung it completely. What had been generated in her hands was a longsword shaped with ice, its cutting ability far greater than that of some incomplete iron sword.

Though she had only just begun practicing the sword, moving her body was her specialty. Swinging the ice sword along a straight line, she attempted to land a fatal blow upon her opponent whilst sealing off his routes to escape. However——

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Setowi (source)

???: “Hahaha~! You’re doing iiit! But, this is far from too far from being enough to land, geeeez!”

???: “——Hk!”

The enemy, with his long hair waving about, evaded her fatal strike by seemingly crawling on the ground.

Glaring with his sharp cuspids unraveled, was the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony who named himself as Ley Batenkaitos.

Upon hearing the name of Sin Archbishop, something akin to dislike swelled up within her.

That was because approximately a month ago, clashing with a great number of Sin Archbishops in the Watergate City of Pristella had led to a large number of settlements, as well as a large number of settlements being delayed, at any rate, it had led to a mountain’s worth of grave happenings.

Plentiful emotions of sadness or bitterness had been born forth.

Even now their elimination or solution had yet to be achieved, that was why everyone was doing their best, and yet.

???: “Why, do you all act like this and——!”

Ley: “Why? Why indeed? Why we wonder? Why is it why? Why must it be why we wonder? Why is it what we certainly wondeeer? Why must what be why? Why is what is why is why is why eh!”

His teasing words possessed no echo of seriousness, her opponent did not intend to give a proper response.

Sensing that, she put strength into her cheeks as to stiffen them. Being able to converse would be the best. However, should the opponent not comply with conversation, then she would not hesitate any further.

That resolute switch was definitely, clearly flipped in that moment.

???: “——Icicle Line.”

Ley: “Wow.”

Accompanying the chant, a sound of freezing space echoed from her rear. Countless ice stakes with sharp tips were born in the air, signifying they were ready to be fired.

Gazing at that, Ley's composure, yet, remained unchanged. With no strong feelings for that, she merely commenced the offensive abiding by her frozen fighting spirit.

???: "————"

The count of the ice stakes being fired was close to, but no greater than, a hundred.

Submerging the aisle seemingly constructed of stone, the dust of the ice which had impacted the floor, the walls, the ceiling fluttered about, the space frozen white bringing immense damage upon the one who taken that immense hit. However——

Ley: "Sorry, onee-san. We're tired of seeing that… Is something we won't say, but we've seen it. See, because we are genius after aaall, we don't think an attack that has already been seen once will hit!"

Swinging the daggers fastened to both his hands, Ley laughed, having outdone the terrific attack of ice.

She inhaled in astonishment, witnessing his talent and skill, and having withstood and outdone it as a matter of fact, as he stood completely unwounded. However, if he had outdone it once, then twice, thrice, even more if that still did not work.

Ley: "You're thinking you'll be able to win if you do it a hundred times? It won't reach even after you do it a thousand times, you know?"

???: "Then I'll just do it ten-thousand times! I won't let you go where everyone is!"

Ley: "Ahaha, well that sure is a large scale! Good gracious, how outrageouuus!"

Putting his hand on his forehead, Ley let out a sigh divided into exasperation and irritation. While viewing that, she quietly abided by her own words.

Though she had pronounced those words whilst simply going with the flow, she must abide by them.

Thus, the moment she attempted to step ahead and fulfill that——

???: “——Ley Batenkaitos!!”

???: “————”

From the rear echoed a voice in the aisle that was neither hers nor Ley’s, leading her to thoughtlessly halt her feet. Upon looking back after being immediately lured by the voice, a shadow showed itself by the corner of the path, rushing into her field of vision.

That was a black-haired youth with somewhat nasty-looking eyes. He dashed into the battlefield with a gallant expression, and was looking at Ley and herself, who were sparring in the aisle.

???: “Ah…”

Suddenly, “Oh no” was the thought which surfaced in her innermost mind.

Though she must say something, a vacuum was born in her words. This was due to the various emotions which overflowed in face of the rushing youth.

However, before “bafflement” was yielded in front of the youth, she hurriedly moved her lips,

???: “It’s dangerous so wait! Um, you may not, know about me, but he’s the enemy! Leave this place to me! Even though you may not know about me!”

She wished for him to leave this place, and for him to not think of herself much.

At the very least, right now at the present instant, should she begin considering things aside from fighting, she would certainly burst into tears and cry.

She did not wish to show her weak side like this and trouble everyone. And yet——

???: “——It’s alright, Emilia-tan.”

The youth who had rushed in called her name.

Emotions she could not concern herself with, like anxiety, like sorrow, strummed and sprang within her chest because of just that, hence she tried her best to make sure they did flow out.

After all——

Subaru: “——My name is Natsuki Subaru. Emilia-tan’s one and only Knight!”

Right now, “Emilia’s” heart was beating with such warmth, such warmth.

Arc 6 Chapter 77 - Beacon of Counterattack

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 4 “Ready, Steady, Go”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

Abiding by his warm emotions, dashing with the entirety of his might, he stepped foot into that place.

Opposite to his heart sending out hot-blooded pulses within the depths of his chest, the outside air had become chilly enough to whiten his exhales, and within this glaciated world, he discovered the back he was looking for.

Subaru: “————”

His gaze plunged towards the slim, supple back, and his heart involuntarily came close to bursting.

Though affection lightened his chest, he narrowly managed to suppress his impulse. This was no time for him to let his heart explode and die.

Clenching his molars, he looked at the face of the enemy opposing on the other side of the struggling back.

Long hair of a dark-brown hue, and a crude outfit as though being wreathed in rags. What was the most impressive, outstanding of all, was the revolting glint in eyes that trampled upon the lives of others, and had turned them into literal food articles——

Subaru: “——Ley Batenkaitos!!”

Roaring at the absolute top of his voice, he asserted his existence, and attracted the attention of the opponent.

Even gaining his attention for a singular moment alone was beneficial. Of course, there lay the possibility of his side sustaining equal blows, but it was nothing if it meant reducing the damage being inflicted upon her.

With affection filling his heart as fuel, he could even fly in the sky right now.

Subaru: “If that could increase our chances of winning, even slightly…”

Halting his feet before the frozen floor, he poured strength into his abdomen and glared at Ley. He maintained a watch at his movements with all of strength, and no matter what move should he make——

???: “Ah…”

Such preparedness of Subaru’s was robbed and shattered, by the amethyst eyes that suddenly turned around.

Subaru: “————”

His black eyes and her amethyst eyes intermingled with each other.

The wave of emotions that appeared in her eyes in that instant was enormous, almost washing him away. Her eyes had always, always, gripped his heart and sought to drown it within themselves.

Because he wished to somehow save the entirety of the multiple emotions levitating in her eyes. Thus——

???: “It’s dangerous so wait! Um, you may not, know about me, but he’s the enemy! Leave this place to me! Even though you may not know about me!”

His eyes twinkled upon seeing her call for vigilance whilst swaying her hands in panic.

Delayed by a beat, he gulped down the meaning behind her words—— within him, certainly present were Memories of being told this very same thing. At the same time, he comprehended the events that had passed.

And, he truly thought—— That he was glad to have been the first one to reach this place.

He knew what he ought to say, how he ought to call out to her.

Furthermore, the thought of how he wanted to call out to her, arose,

Subaru: "——It's alright, Emilia-tan."

Sorry for causing problems for you, for making you worry, for making you wait.

Wielding those sentiments, though unbefitting for this place, he nodded whilst loosening his lips. And while looking at the young girl, whose eyes grasped comprehension with the few words he had said, he resumed.

With a finger of his right hand pointing towards the heavens, he posed with one hand on his waist.

Though there was no need for him to be doing this, doing this enabled him to solidify his resolve. For that purpose——

Subaru: "——My name is Natsuki Subaru. Emilia-tan's one and only Knight!"

Emilia: "Subaru—— Hk!!"

Subaru: "Bah!?"

The instant he declared so with a determined, smiling expression, the silver-haired young girl—— Emilia, dashed towards Subaru with fearsome velocity.

Colliding, Subaru was thrown backwards but he somehow supported Emilia's frame. No need for concern, she was light as an angel's feather. No problem at all.

But if there were to be something labelled a problem——

Subaru: "E-Emilia-tan!? This is so sudden I'm freaking surprised, and you're also super light and smell so nice! Did you change your shampoo!?"

Emilia: "Stupid Subaru! Geez, you're reaaally so stupid! I was so, so worried! Yet just like that… Stupid! Stupid stupid!"

Subaru: "Wow, you're really calling me stupid an astounding number of times! Well, I can't make any excuses…"

Subaru was overwhelmed as Emilia pressed him with widened eyes within his arms. Since he was meanwhile also glued together with Emilia, Subaru's heart was a total mess and even his vocabulary crumbled.

Putting all this aside, Subaru reluctantly parted with Emilia, grasping her slender shoulders and distancing her body.

Subaru: "I'm sorry for making you worry. But, I've returned… I've been revived? Restored? Or should I say, I've become the complete Natsuki Subaru, either way, it's alright, so."

Emilia: "Ah…"

Subaru: "I'll leave all of Natsuki Subaru in the past—— This is Natsuki Subaru's explosive birth[260]."

Energetically talking on and on, he forcefully attempted to gain Emilia some relief. However, in the midst of this plan of Subaru's, Emilia blinked and lay a single finger on his chest.

A ticklish, gentle sensation. Subaru's whole body involuntarily shivered,

Emilia: "Did you become whole in full?"

Subaru: "————"

Emilia: "Because, even the Subaru who didn't have memories was Subaru. So, even if Subaru remembers everything now, that Subaru, who worked his hardest and put his life on the line even for the short while he was here for, was…"

Subaru: "——Yeah, mhm. It's alright."

Whilst touching his chest, Emilia affirmed Subaru's footsteps with faltering words.

There existed a Natsuki Subaru who, due to the unification of Memories, could be interpreted as having become one or even having disappeared, and a time wherein their hearts were touched by him also existed within them.

[260] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "This line is a reference to «Pokémon The Movie 2000: The Power of One», known in Japan as «Pocket Monsters the Movie: The Phantom Pokémon, Lugia's Explosive Birth".

——Yeah, then it's simple.

Subaru: "The fact that «I» was within myself, and within Emilia-tan, certainly remains even now. So, it's really alright, Emilia-tan."

Emilia: "…Mhm."

Subaru: "So please expect great things here onward from Perfect Natsuki Subaru[261]. With all the frustration piled up in this time of turmoil as the trigger, *let's & go*[262] towards a bright future!"

Emilia: "Sorry, I've got no idea what you're talking about."

Emilia shook her head and responded, as Subaru smiled with a thumb of his raised.

This indifferent attitude of hers was also so, so lovable and something he eagerly looked forward to; Subaru would prefer to spend countless minutes, countless hours, countless days just messing around with Emilia like this, but——

???: "——About time you knooow, had enough of your emotional meeting?"

Saying so, raising his voice and calling out to the timidly touching Subaru and Emilia, was the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony with a devious, malicious, vicious smile.

But Subaru raised his eyebrows, in response to the fact that he did not launch an attack in this interval.

Subaru: "Yeah. I didn't think you'd wait so conscientiously. Did you become contrite?"

Ley: "Become *contreat*[263] you say, that would be outrageous! It's just that, you know, we are Gourmet you seeee. From onii-san's perspective that'd be what you call gourmet? Aaas one who knows the delight

[261] Possible Dragon Ball reference (to Perfect Cell).

[262] As you may imagine, this is Engrish, and it sounds just as stupid as it reads.

[263] A very subtle pun in Japanese, as the "悔" in "悔い改めた" (to repent) is read the same as the "食" (meaning food) in the word used by Ley (『喰い』改める), making the two's words just different conjugations of the same verb, "kuiaratameta" from Subaru, "kuiaratameru" from Ley.

of meals, wanting to be proooperly attentive to the setting of the table is what it's about. If the *shokutaku*[264] is untidy then it's a kill-joy. Isn't that right?"

Speaking of table manners difficult to apply practically, Ley laughed with a shrill voice in a strange and frivolous manner. Whilst listening to the ear-hurting voice of his laughter, Subaru gave a deep nod. And,

Subaru: "I see, makes sense. I completely thought…"

Ley: "Completely thought?"

Subaru: "That you'd become all afraid, considering how ugly of a shape your little sister was left in."

Ley: "——Hk."

The next instant, Ley's expression completely changed from that of having a smile of leisure.

His smile disappeared in an instant, what appeared instead was scorching rage. Abiding by that intense fury, Ley's body kicked the frozen aisle and plunged ahead in the blink of an eye.

Ley: "What would you, know about our Louis——!!"

Subaru: "I know nothing. I just arbitrarily had my body invaded by her. I have no idea what she was thinking, nor do I want to know."

Seemingly truly possessing sentiments and love for his younger sister, the enraged Ley's dagger inched closer towards Subaru. However, Subaru did not fear the approaching footsteps of Death.

Controlled by violent emotion, if Ley was not viewing anything but Subaru, then that was precisely what he was aiming for——

Emilia: "——I'm also here, don't, forget!"

Ley: "Gah, buh."

[264] Engrish flip. Means "dinner table" (食卓), originally "テーブル" (table).

Accompanied by a brave voice, Emilia's beautiful long legs drew an arc. Energetically rotating them a great angle, she intercepted Ley's face as he plunged straight ahead.

The instant it hit directly, Emilia's ice battle technique Ice Brand Arts was activated reinforcing her toes, which were striking the enemy, with boots of ice as bonus.

Emilia: "HIYAHHHHHH!"

Pouring strength into her fair leg, Emilia swung the leg which had struck the enemy's frontal teeth with all her might. Despite somehow defending against direct damage, Ley's petite stature was unable to withstand that force and was blown away, sliding on the frozen floor and landing deep down the aisle.

Emilia subsequently pointed her palm towards that direction, and the generated stumps of ice mercilessly pursued Louis's elder brother, having collapsed; icicle dust then engulfed the aisle, seemingly succeeding in inflicting enormous damage onto Gluttony.

Subaru: "That did it! This was a mixed attack of my cheers and Emilia-tan's adorable intent to kill!"

Emilia: "Is that supposed to be a compliment?"

Subaru: "I's a compliment indeed! The best! So cute! I wanna marry you!"

Emilia: "Marr… Geez, no messing around."

With her cheeks slightly red, Emilia's reaction as she fixedly looked towards him was unexpected. He thought her refute would be more powerful, so the embarrassment rebounded onto Subaru as well.

Subaru: "No no, I'm acting way too merry since having met with Emilia-tan. All messing about comes after the problems have been solved."

Emilia: "Subaru! I don't know when another attack will come! So don't let your guard down!"

Subaru: "I know! Though I'd openly welcome it if this makes for his defeat…"

Straightening out their minds at once, Subaru and Emilia turned towards breaking the deadlock of the situation—— Emilia concentrated on Ley Batenkaitos before her eyes, whilst Subaru concentrated on the problems encircling Pleiades Watchtower.

The five obstacles—— even after Natsuki Subaru's identity problem had been solved, they still remained and exposed this Watchtower and all of Subaru's comrades within it to hazard.

But some conditions had changed. For example, the menace of the shadow that descended as though symbolizing a time limit, swallowing the entire Tower and bringing ruin to everything. If that was——

Subaru: "If that's the *keibatsu*[265] much like I've imagined it till now…"

The event of the shadow swallowing everything, was the reappearance of the calamity he had formerly encountered in the Sanctuary as well.

The story behind why that happened was because he had spoken to Echidna within the Tomb and had unburdened himself by telling her everything about Return by Death. If the happenings occurring in this Tower were also of the same kind, then that shadow would reset everything in cases when Return by Death had been leaked outside for the most part.

In other words, it was surely because Louis Arneb had been within Subaru.

Now that Louis Arneb had been eliminated, and her existence had disappeared from Subaru's interior, there was something like a fifty-percent chance that that shadow would swallow Pleiades Watchtower.

Hence he did not possess the option to rely on that and let the circumstances proceed slowly.

Subaru: "Emilia-tan! I have a plan!"

Emilia: "——! Got it! Then, let's follow it!"

Subaru: "I haven't said anything yet though!?"

Subaru arranged the options in his mind and accordingly called out to her, and the next instant came Emilia's ready consent flying towards him without him having said a single word of explanation.

Subaru was surprised, as Emilia said "It's fine!" in response,

[265] Engrish flip. Means "punishment" (刑罰), originally "ペナルティー" (penalty).

Emilia: “Subaru’s plan must be one he came up with after thinking as much as he can! I can trust it far more than having to think about a lot of things and coming up with an answer here!”

Subaru: “——Ah, damnit! Makes me so happy you’d say that!”

Scratching his head, Subaru powerfully stomped the floor as though in response to the faith that made him feel uneasy. Afterwards, Subaru pointed towards the interior of the aisle, to the space filled with icicle dust,

Subaru: “For now, Emilia-tan, give him another shot!”

Emilia: “Aye!”

With an explosive, dynamic sound, Emilia dropped a floe of ice onto the interior of the aisle.

It would be great if this merciless strike made for the finishing blow for Ley, but that would be a dim prospect. In reality, Emilia spilled out a note saying “Ah!” as she widened her eyes upon the impact,

Emilia: “Subaru! The Sin Archbishop from earlier…”

Subaru: “Tch, he’s a tenacious bastard. But there’s probably no way he’s taken no damage.”

When Emilia turned backward, Subaru understood from her expression that Ley had erased his form from the course of impact.

He had become fed-up with that tenaciousness, on the same level as that of a cockroach, but his characteristic of judging the situation to be unfavorable and remove himself accordingly was different from Petelgeuse of aggravated diligence and tactless frankness, or Regulus who did not possess the word “humility” in his dictionary—— Amongst the Sin Archbishops, Ley Batenkaitos had the greatest survival instinct.

However, it was inconceivable that he would withdraw from the Tower.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan! For now, we meet up with everyone else! We need to reorganize how our people are deployed! Everyone needs to do their best or this situation won’t be broken through!”

Emilia: “Right! But, is it okay if we let him escape like that?”

Subaru: “I’ll be honest, I would’ve preferred if the one from earlier had finished him off, but…”

Having retreated once, Ley would surely make the best use of this time to catch up on his breath as well. In that case, it would be difficult to calculate the necessary time and certainty for striking Ley.

Then they might as well prioritize their course-of-action in this situation, and leave his life in his hands.

Subaru: “No need to worry, he won’t leave the Tower or anything. As he’s been stimulated a lot because of Louis… because of his little sister. The misunderstanding *siscon* bastard won’t back down.”

Emilia: “*Sisskon*…?”

Subaru: “It means he’s affectionate to his younger sister. Though in his case, it’d be being affectionate to the little sister in a negative sense.”

At the very least, it did not seem as though Louis held deep love for Ley or Roy, her true elder brothers, on her end. To devote themselves for the sake of Louis without even knowing that, they were either pitiable victims or just role-playing maniacs intoxicated with that duty.

However, ironically, only the unbending distorted ways of the Sin Archbishops could be relied on.

Subaru: “Someone who can adapt to circumstances and flexibly change methods to deal with something, wouldn’t become something like a Sin Archbishop in the first place.”

That was Subaru’s appraisal of the Sin Archbishops, having unwillingly repeatedly come in contact with the Sin Archbishops.

Hence, it had not been easy to track down the dirtily-living Ley Batenkaitos. Meanwhile, situations Subaru could not interfere with continued to head towards ruin. Before that happened——

Subaru: “Emilia-tan! We go where everyone is!”

Emilia: “Mhm, got it! But, I don’t know where everyone is…”

Subaru: “——It’s my duty, to *SubaNavi* them.”

The Natsuki Subaru Navigation System.

——SubaNavi for short, as in Cor Leonis, was activated by him.

Subaru: "————"

Queer, deep emotions came to his mind upon the activation of the Authority wherein coexisted familiar and unfamiliar sensations.

Concentrating the whereabouts of his beating heart, he magnified everything within the close range of his radar with his beating heart at the center. That was close to sonar, which grasped the surroundings based on the reverberation of sounds.

But, what he could feel was his comrades' warmth and fleeting lights, thus it was a more limited sensation.

——However, that which specialized solely in feeling the existence of his comrades, rather than being an omnipotent might, was presently the Authority that held most worth for Subaru.

Figuring the location of those fleeting lights, Subaru lifted his face.

Just as he had first hurriedly met up with Emilia, next, they would prioritize meeting up with the members she had earlier enabled to run away. In other words——

Subaru: "——First, we retrieve my cute *aikata*!"

△▼△▼△▼△

——Through the sensations being conveyed from Cor Leonis, Subaru grasped the majority of the happenings occurring in Pleiades Watchtower.

What he understood through the effect of the Authority was, at maximum, the individual respective conditions of his comrades and a vague sense of distance with Subaru at the center. His comrades' fields of vision could be shared, but he could not grasp their state with clarity.

But still, should they sustain an injury he could substitute for the injury, and should they be burdened with recoil, he could take over the recoil. That was the effect of Subaru's Authority of Greed, and various usages could be mused for it.

Emilia: "Subaru, are you okay? You look pale…"

Subaru: "Mhm, yeah, I'm good I'm good. Well, I'm acting strong a bit, but I'm still alright. I can still work hard at this level."

As they dashed through the aisle side-by-side, Emilia worried for Subaru whilst he let out a heavy sigh. Her voice, like a silver bell, and her amethyst eyes tickled his heart, and Subaru revealed his honest thoughts.

It was agonizing. But he could still endure it. Those were his true thoughts.

Subaru: "————"

As pointed out by Emilia, Subaru's paleness was also of course due to the bedlam that had unfolded with Louis in order to recover his Memories. Mental abrasion was quite difficult to heal, and it was not an easy task to make a worn-down heart stand up again.

But what was presently making Subaru suffer was a much more simple, clear cause—— Ram's inferior physical form, because he had been preliminarily taking up the anguish she had always been experiencing on a normal basis.

Subaru: "Taking up her wounds without permission, Ram is sure not going to be happy…"

It would never sit well with Ram, who actually possessed a strong sense of responsibility, to let others substitute for her own recoil. Should he propose it to her face with "I want to shoulder your pain together with you", she would simply laugh it off with a snort, and in the end stuff steamed potatoes up his nose.

So, he would shoulder Ram's inferior physical form out of his own will. He would not let her refuse. That was why——

Emilia: "Subaru!"

By the shattered angle of the aisle, as she saw clearly ahead Emilia called Subaru. The meaning behind her call was known by Subaru, whose Lion's Heart was beating.

The comrades that had escaped from the battlefield and taken distance, whilst Emilia preoccupied Ley.

A jet-black ground dragon, and a blue-haired young girl on its back. Holding its reins was her elder sister possessing a face so identical they were like two peas in a pod, and standing beside her was a little girl in a dress——

Subaru: "Beako!!"

Emilia: "Beatrice!"

Beatrice: "——Hk, S-Subaru and a god-knows-who girl are here, in fact!?"

Beatrice turned behind to look at Subaru and Emilia, who were energetically dashing towards them.

Paying no heed to her astonishment, Subaru and Emilia reached her at almost the same time.

At the same pace, he hugged and picked up the young girl as she shouted "Wakya~",

Subaru: "Oh, Beako! Beako, you're so light! You're so cute! You've got such an intelligent look!"

Beatrice: "Wa-wa-wa-wa…"

Emilia: "Look, Beatrice! Subaru remembered everything! Ah, wait, you still don't know who I am, isn't that right… But, Subaru remembered! That reaaally made me so happy…"

Beatrice: "W-wait, I suppose! Wait, in fact! It's like both a known occasion and an unknown occasion have arrived, so Betty's mind is all topsy-turvy, I suppose!"

Whilst being swung around, Beatrice was mutually knocked down by Subaru and Emilia's words, as she darted her eyes about in confusion. However, she immediately pointed her palm forward, making Emilia shut up, and,

Beatrice: "…Subaru."

Subaru: "Yeah."

Beatrice: “Do you, truly, remember everything, in fact? About Betty, about the time you’ve spent with Betty as well, everything?”

Subaru: “Yeah, that’s right. Don’t make such an anxious expression. I remember everything, and if anything can just make up a lot of the stuff too. The *historia*[266] of everything that happened and didn’t happen between you and me.”

Beatrice: “No need to make up what didn’t happen, I suppose! Agh, geez!”

Raised in his arms, Beatrice sandwiched Subaru’s face between her hands. Looking at the silent Subaru from an inch’s worth of distance, Beatrice let out a deep sigh.

Her eyes, with a peculiar pattern on them, subsequently quivered,

Beatrice: “Truly, all Subaru does is swing Betty around, in fact.”

Subaru: “The Contract’s condition was that I’d be a Contractor who’d never let you get bored, after all. And, you said that I’m no *Superman*…”

Beatrice: “——?”

Subaru: “Looking at it objectively, I’m pretty *Supermanly*, am I not?”

Closing an eye, Subaru winked and smiled at Beatrice. For an instant Beatrice widened her eyes at his response, but then immediately pouted.

Beatrice: “Don’t get carried away, I suppose!”

Subaru: “Let me get carried away. I’m the type who gets things done when I get carried away. Along with that…”

Beatrice: “————”

[266] This is kind-of Engrish (ヒストリア) but not really. Could be a very obscure loanword, as “historia” is the translation of the word “history” in some romance languages, and its translation in others is very similar in writing and pronunciation.

Glancing sideways, he noticed Ram standing there with a dazed expression. She narrowed her light-crimson eyes and looked at Subaru with a piercing—— No, stabbing gaze.

Subaru: “Ah, nee-sama?”

Ram: “That was quite the fast snowmelt, wasn’t it. Ultimately, a pointless fuss befitting Barusu.”

Subaru: “…Well, in essence, I guess it did last only for a day.”

Subaru could not do anything but smile wryly, upon it all being labelled as a pointless fuss.

In reality, Subaru had experienced close to twenty deaths. Upon thinking of the mental recoil he had received in accepting them all as his own, it would be impossible to think that every happening had passed in a single day.

From Subaru’s perspective, it felt as if the amnesia had lasted for multiple years[267].

Subaru: “But, I’ve come to terms with everything and made it back. The man who gives one-hundred-and-fifty percent of his strength for everyone, Natsuki Subaru, pleased to be in your company.”

Ram: “Hah! How nice. Say whatever you like. However, Ram’s exceedingly benevolent self shall overlook it…”

Subaru: “Overlook it? ——*Bangladesh*!?”

Beatrice: “Kyaaa~, in fact!”?

Ram spoke deeply meaningful words and subsequently paused, and just as he tilted his head upon her words he, together with Beatrice, was blown away by a tail whip that targeted his blind spot coming from the ground dragon.

As Subaru and Beatrice twirled around, they were caught by a soft sensation. Upon looking, it had been Emilia who halted their spinning. She softly supported Subaru’s body from his back’s side and smiled with a “Fufu”,

[267] Possibly a snide fourth wall break. The chapter in which Subaru lost his memories, Chapter 33, was released in 2017, and the chapter in which Subaru regained his memories was released in 2019.

Emilia: “It looks like Patrasche-chan is also reaaally happy that Subaru came back.”

Patrasche: “————”

Ahead of Emilia’s line of sight stood a jet-black majestic figure, exhaling from its nose.

Having gotten a taste of one of its powerful tail strikes, Subaru readjusted Beatrice, whom he was carrying in his arms and,

Subaru: “You’ve always been such a *tsundere*[268]… No, my bad. I made you worry a lot too. In the first place…”

Patrasche: “————”

Receiving Emilia’s support, Subaru fixed his stance and faced Patrasche, who was looking at him with a sharp glint in its eyes. And, thinking back to the unchanging devotion of the affectionate dragon during the time he was devoid of Memories,

Subaru: “Really, you save me so many times. I love you.”

Patrasche: “————”

Subaru: “…So you’re not going to slap me away like usual, right?”

Every time he made a flimsy confession of love to her, it was standard that Patrasche’s lady-like self would discipline him, but that was not the case with this time’s confession of his. Otherwise,

Beatrice: “Even this ground dragon can tell when you’re joking and when you’re being serious, that’s what that means, I suppose.”

Subaru: “…Yeah.”

Nobody knew when she had gotten so close to it, but Beatrice spoke for Patrasche’s true heart. The fact that she did not get struck by another tail whip meant that her interpretation was correct.

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[268] Character with a personality who is initially polarized, displaying cold, temperature and even hostile sides, before gradually showing a warmer, friendlier side over time.

Now if Beatrice were to also learn the ability of deciphering and translating, then Otto could finally be dismissed of his duty.

Subaru: “——Rem.”

On Patrasche’s back was Rem, her body leaning on the saddle.

Of course, it would not be possible to hear her eternally asleep self’s voice of delight upon the return of Subaru’s Memories. However, the emotion that arose within Subaru’s heart upon looking at Rem’s side profile was different.

Subaru: “————”

What if, in that white world, persuaded by Louis Arneb’s cajolery, in the instant he was truly going to fall into Gluttony’s poison fangs, had the voice which had kicked the hopeless weakling up not been present?

The existence known as her, truly, would not let Natsuki Subaru loose, even should he forget himself.

That was why, once again, after overcoming a total of forty Deaths, he ended up coming back.

Subaru: “I’ll save getting lost in thoughts for later. Anyway, my memories are back. I appreciate all of you wanting to celebrate it, but let’s clean up the situation at once.”

Ram: “Celebrate you say, truly, what an overestimation you give yourself. Wonder what happened in this short duration… Besides.”

Emilia: “——Ah, me?”

Snorting her nose upon Subaru’s lowered tone, Ram then turned her gaze towards Emilia. Levitating in her eyes was usual arrogance, and an equal sense of unease.

It was clear from Beatrice’s reaction, but indeed——

Emilia: “I’m Emilia. You don’t remember, I guess, yeah…”

Ram: "…The person who let Ram and others escape earlier, that is known. But, that is all, nothing further can be remembered. How do things stand for you, Beatrice-sama…"

Beatrice: "Same for Betty, in fact… The effect of the Authority of Gluttony is what it is, I suppose."

At Ram's assent, Beatrice identically lowered her face.

What had occurred to Julius's person in Pristella, had descended onto Emilia's person within this Tower as well. With this forming an omnipresent excruciating wound——

Emilia: "Right! I am Emilia, just Emilia. There's lots of stuff I want to say, but I'm family who's looking in the same direction as both Beatrice and Ram!"

Beatrice & Ram: "————"

Emilia: "If you can just understand that much, then for now, I'll be fine. Ever since I got to know that Subaru remembered, I'm feeling reaaally good."

Emilia flexed the biceps of her fair arms, and stout-heartedly—— no, she was not merely acting strong, but truly seeming to fear nothing from the bottom of her heart, smiled.

Not only Subaru but Beatrice too came at a loss for words upon her exceedingly confident conduct. Unusually enough, even Ram widened her eyes, unable to suppress her astonishment.

Emilia: "Huh? Did I say something weird?"

Subaru: "…Well, rather than weird, it was super-duper cool."

Scratching his cheeks, Subaru answered upon Emilia's slightly flustered reaction. Subsequent to Subaru's response, Ram said "Indeed" and took a deep inhale.

She steadily affirmed Emilia's conduct and,

Ram: "Emilia, was it. Enigmatically enough, upon looking at you Ram feels the nooks of her mind become awfully uneasy… The same happened on Rem's instance."

Emilia: "That's…"

Ram: “Everything about you disappearing from the mind and being replaced by a void is difficult, is what it surely means. Though it is difficult to consider that Ram had someone like that other than Rem.”

Narrowing her eyes, Ram touched her head with a finger as though tracing Emilia’s disappeared existence within herself. Her words made Subaru remember something out-of-place.

Though Ram may say so, it was unmistakable for Subaru, who had been witness to the two’s relationship from the sidelines, that she cherished Emilia. Although with the vanishing of those spans of time, it was only natural that it would not come to Ram’s mind. However——

Ram: “The throbbing and aching of the mind Ram feels upon looking at you, is the answer for the relationship between you and Ram. So, rest assured—— Ram, dislikes remaining defeated.”

Emilia: “——Same goes for me. We’re going to strike back, absolutely, no matter what.”

Ram: “Indeed, let the payback be a-hundred-million times greater.”

Subaru: “That many times!?”

Subaru felt Emilia and Ram to be reliable, as the two exchanged fearless smiles.

After all, originally, once the Name was plundered, the victim drowned in isolation as all relationships around them collapsed. However, Emilia did not give in against isolation and managed to retain the core of her heart. Thanks to that, the collapse supposed to commence from her could not destroy the foundation of Subaru as well as that of Ram and the others.

On top of that——

Ram: “Barusu, kindly give suggestions. However, do not think that all the missteps so far can be salvaged just because your forgetful self managed to remember again.”

Subaru: “I know without you having to point it out, but how many things do you plan to point out!?”

But, he was grateful that they were willing to be cooperative without having to be convinced.

Anyhow, the dilemmas laid within this Tower of the sand sea were far too impending for accumulating trust, explaining the situation, and confronting each one of the problems whilst tying bonds. Hence——

Subaru: “Let’s obliterate this overeating festival those utmost worst three siblings started ,with the power of our bonds.”

Emilia: “Yes!”

Beatrice: “Naturally, in fact.”

Ram: “Haa!”

The three parties gave their three respective answers directed towards three of Subaru’s greatest enemies, as he gave a deep nod to the words from all of them. And,

Subaru: “——It’s still all over the place, but it feels like I’ve come back home!”

Saying so, he vocalized first and foremost a quiet, yet a valuable and definite deep emotion.

Arc 6 Chapter 78 – Four Corners

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 4 “Ready, Steady, Go”, Parts 3-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, commissioned by unknown person) — Complete

Subaru: “——Are you ready? The Tower’s in pretty bad shape right now. If I were to go out and say how bad it is, it’s nearly as bad as playing Othello with all four of its corners taken away from you.”

Ram: “That… must be pretty bad.”

Ram’s expression clouded over as Subaru launched into his explanation, holding one of his fingers up in the air. Quite the solemn look had appeared on the latter’s face. Albeit, Ram was not the only one who was taking this seriously. Emilia and Beatrice, who were listening in as well, were like that too.

Othello—— more commonly referred to by the name Reversi, was a board game in which two players competed on an eight-by-eight board, making a total of sixty-four squares, using black and white pieces.

Naturally this was knowledge Subaru had brought with him from his original world. But since it had been relatively easy to recreate the game here, he had introduced it to the Roswaal mansion fairly early on. It brought a huge stir, with it being extremely well received, especially from Emilia.

That was why he was able to properly convey the gravity of the current situation to them. Having all four corners taken in Othello meant that one was already completely lost.

Furthermore, though she had not partaken in it much, Ram had literally been as strong as an Oni in the few occasions she had played, as one would expect from her.

In any case——

Beatrice: “Losing all four corners, an utterly outrageous situation, I suppose… That’s going too far even as a handicap, in fact.”

Emilia: “I guess even I’d end up becoming as busy as a bee and winning if I got ahold of so many of them…”

Subaru: “Who even says «busy as a bee» these days…”

Emilia: “——! Subaru, can you say that again?”

Subaru: “I will, but later. Later.”

Emilia snapped onto Subaru’s traditional retort, looking somewhat dejected at having her request denied. Although he felt a bit guilty seeing her like that, the flirting would have to wait until later, just like he had said many times.

Their first priority was to find a way out of the situation they were in. And for that——

Subaru: “The four corners… They’re the two Gluttonies inside the Tower, as well as the swarm of Witchbeasts they’ve called along. Also, it pains me to say this, but our comrade… Oh yeah, I guess it’s sort of debatable if I can call them that…”

Everyone: “——?”

Subaru had been about to mention the fourth corner, but for a split second he faltered on what to say next.

Namely because not even he had come up with an answer that would both be simple to understand and properly describe the woman who unintentionally stood in their way as the fourth corner.

He was not so distant to her to call her an acquaintance. That, and their connection was not weak enough to be called bitter enemies either. But, did they share enough of a destiny such that he could call her a companion? At the very least, he could perhaps leave it at them having sort of like a clueless, but very much unsanctioned teacher-and-student relationship.

Still, how did Emilia and the rest of them view her?

But, as Subaru fell prey to his hesitation——

Emilia: “You said comrade right? What’s happened to Shaula?”

Subaru: “————”

Emilia: “——? Subaru?”

Subaru: “No, it’s nothing. That’s right, I do mean Shaula.”

Subaru immediately acted like nothing was up and nodded back at Emilia. It hadn’t been just her; Beatrice and Ram also hadn’t seen anything wrong with how Emilia had recognised her.

The way they’d perceived her had been the same as Emilia, regardless of whether they had memories of the latter or not. In other words, it served as proof that they viewed Shaula as someone friendly to them.

Subaru: “Am I an idiot? No, I am definitely an idiot.”

Stumbling over the obvious was a bad habit of Natsuki Subaru. Yet, he would reflect hard on things, leveraging them so that he could give it his all; and this, was one of his strengths.

A compliment for each time he put himself down. Ideally he would give himself a hundred for each time he did.

That much would do. Though the true ideal would be giving himself ten-thousand compliments without putting himself down even once.

Subaru: “Anyways, about Shaula… Well before that, do you remember the *kimari*[269] of the Tower? The ones that must not be broken. They were explained before, right?”

Ram: “Yes, they were. We cannot leave without completing the Examinations, we cannot violate the rules of the Examinations, we cannot disrespect the Libraries, we cannot damage the Tower… In Ram’s belief, those were all the violations.”

[269] Engrish flip. Means “rule” (決まり), originally “ルール” (rule).

Subaru: “Yeah, precisely.”

Subaru snapped his fingers at Ram after she had readily laid them out. Then he pointed down at his feet and swung his arm around, indicating the entire Tower.

Subaru: “So, with those rules… The fourth corner shows up when one of them is broken. I don’t know which one specifically, but one of them will. Then, after that…”

Ram: “She will bare her fangs at us, just like she said—— How annoying.”

Ram, assuming her typical pose with her arms crossed together, batted one of her eyes shut as she imagined the worst.

Shaula’s insane combat prowess was well-known to Subaru of course, considering he had gone through many loops where she had killed him. But other than him, the rest of them were also well-aware of that after they had been showered by sniper fire from afar, back in the sand sea.

Beatrice: “That vapid girl is quite strong when she uses those things of hers, I suppose. Even if we’re better off than before, where we couldn’t do a thing due to being attacked from afar, it’s not going to change the fact that things are going to get grim if she turns into our enemy, in fact.”

With their arms folded, both Beatrice and Ram frowned, their brows wrinkling up.

The fact that they were so quick on the uptake was a huge help, since he could cut down the time he spent explaining. From all those sullen faces, it was only Emilia that raised her hand. Her face, which was the cutest in the whole-wide world, was still free of wrinkles,

Emilia: “But we’d be going up against Shaula, no? Can’t we somehow persuade her by talking to her? Shaula is reaaally attached to Subaru, so if he tried his hardest, maybe…”

Subaru: “I’d love a peaceful resolution to this, but getting Shaula to the negotiating table seems like a tall order. In regards to her being attached to me… I guess nothing about that’s changed, in a broad sense.”

Ram: “Meaning she will be primarily targeting you, Barusu. The fact that she has got her targets narrowed down is going to be extremely useful.”

It could be perceived as her targeting the weaker members in their camp, but regardless, Subaru agreed with Ram's thoughts.

Rather than facing a situation in which the knowledge of who would be targeted by the enemies indiscriminately lurking in the Tower was missing, it would be easier to come up with a plan of counterattack that involved having Subaru recklessly targeted.

So, putting the issues they were facing in a nutshell——

Beatrice: "——The four corners are the two Gluttonies, their swarm of Witchbeasts, as well as Shaula, who'll come to attack us, I suppose."

Subaru: "Though two of these corners are already being dealt with. All thanks to Beako taking command."

During the time Subaru had spent cowering in the Library of Taygeta, the smart and adorable Beatrice had taken everyone with her in turn, and got them busy dealing with the damage that had struck the Tower.

She had sent Meili to the balcony, from where she could overlook the swarm of Witchbeasts. Then, as part of that, she had also joined up with Ram and Emilia after they had taken Rem out of the Green Room—— Unfortunately though, they had encountered Ley enroute, which had led to them falling into this situation where Emilia's Name had been taken away from her.

Emilia: "Mhmhm, it's okay. Subaru still remembers me, so I'm completely fine with it. Even though he often ends up forgetting about our promises, it still makes me reaaally happy that he remembers me properly."

Subaru: "Ngh, what's with stabbing me in the back all of a sudden?"

Beatrice: "It looks to me like it's just her usual, in fact. That girl seems to know you well too, I suppose. Though not as well as I do."

Subaru: "No need to fight over me, my sweethearts."

Subaru gave a few nods as he stroked Beatrice's head, basking in their affection for him. Then, while still steeped in emotion, Ram called out to him with a "Barusu",

Ram: “You said that two of the corners are being dealt with, right? It is known that one of them is Meili holding back the swarm of Witchbeasts, but what about the other one?”

Subaru: “——Julius.”

Subaru grabbed his chest in reply to Ram and turned his attention to the beating of his heart.

The power of his Cor Leonis was still going strong. He was naturally taking Ram’s burdens from her. Also, the whereabouts of his companions were being broadcast to him in real-time.

From those, there was a light that definitely seemed to correspond to Julius. And the place he was at was——

Subaru: “——He’s on the Second Floor, locked in battle with the enemy.”

Emilia: “The Second Floor… You can’t mean that…”

Subaru: “Yeah, I do.”

He nodded back at Emilia as she quickly turned pale, before sneaking a furtive glance up above.

He could not see it firsthand, since the ceiling was in the way, but he could most definitely feel the signs of the furious fight that was taking place beyond his gaze.

——Julius Juukulius and Reid Astrea’s rematch had begun.

Subaru: “————”

In the end, it looked like that settlement was unavoidable.

After Subaru had fallen to his knees earlier, unable to pick himself back up, Beatrice had taken charge of their companions. The opponent Julius had ended up waging battle with had been Reid Astrea, even under Beatrice’s command.

That naturally had been influenced by the fact Roy Alphard—— or rather, Reid, who had taken over the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony’s body and attained freedom, actively sought its conclusion.

Nevertheless, Subaru had gone through many Deaths and crossed through many possibilities, whether he had wanted to or not. And that had made him understand something.

——As annoying as it was, “fate” existed.

No matter what road one followed, the firm, unchangeable reality that lay there was called “fate”.

The fluctuations of history were so unyielding, to the point it really made one believe things were predetermined. It was almost like the results had already been determined by fate, with all the branches converging there.

That had been the outcome of all their wills coming together to try and achieve their respective goals. However, precisely because of that, they had become so closely entwined with each other, that they had never come apart.

Yet, could it not be said as well that that meant there was no hope ahead?

Considering that the conclusion between Julius Juukulius and Reid Astrea was inevitable, it could only mean that——

Subaru: “Reid should have assimilated with one of the Gluttonies, his takeover should be almost done. Though we’ll let Julius settle things with Reid. We’re going to deal with the remaining three.”

Ram: “Is that really going to be fine, Barusu?”

Subaru: “——? What do you mean?”

Subaru cocked his head earnestly in response to Ram’s question. But on seeing him react like that she just muttered out a brief “Nevermind”,

Ram: “Ram already knows how Barusu goes about things. Looks like I am losing my edge as well. Guess we have no choice but to rely on Barusu’s proposal.”

Subaru: “I don’t really fully get what you mean, but you do know I can tell you’re making fun of me?”

Emilia: “Huh? No, no, she’s just complimenting you. Ram’s saying that she reaaally relies on you, Subaru. Hehe, now I’m going to need to work hard.”

Ram: "…Ram will be having a word with you later, Emilia."

Emilia replied back to the mortified Ram with a "Yessir", a slightly happy trill in her voice.

Despite the situation they were in, Emilia was most likely glad, and found it refreshing that Ram was not using honorifics to address her. Now that their master-servant connection was gone, the attitude she was showing Emilia was one of perhaps friends, or maybe a little sister that was always quite a handful.

Ram did not have the opportunity anymore to play the part of the capable big sister now that her actual little sister did not require much to handle. Nevertheless, she seemed that way now thanks to the bizarrely happy-go-lucky Emilia.

Subaru: "Anyways, that's it for what's going on in the Tower. What we need to do next is sort out the best people for each place. This sorting business is where Natsuki Subaru really shines!"

Ram: "You sure are really humble…"

Subaru: "Humble or not, it's still important work! This is what they mean when they talk about unsung heroes! This is something only I… That's right, this is something only I can do! This is my battle… Owowowow!!"

Ram: "Just hurry up and start sorting."

Ram slapped his face for spending too long on the preambles. Feeling the pain of the damage he had received, Subaru looked around at all three of their faces—— as well as the ground dragon's, and said, "Are you all ready?".

From here on out, it would be all-out war, in its truest sense. It barely made any difference whether one were a human or ground dragon, and in the first place, Patrasche was typically far more useful than Subaru himself.

But if Super-Subaru[270] were added to the mix, their possibilities would explode ten-fold, and then double.

[270] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "The bit above seems to be a reference to the Japanese Quiz Show «Quiz Derby".

Subaru: "*One for all, all for one*[271]. All for one, one for all. We can't win without having everyone on board. We can't have even one of us missing. We will start winning if we've got everyone, because we…"

Emilia: "——Because we came to this Tower to get back what was taken from us, we won't allow ourselves to lose them."

Subaru: "Exactly."

Subaru gave Emilia a nod with a snap of his fingers before regaining his composure. And then——

Subaru: "So, first things first, Ley Batenkaitos's opponent shall be——"

△▼△▼△▼△

???: "——Barusu."

Subaru: "Huh?"

They began to head to their posts after they had finished their discussion. However, someone grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and forced him to a halt before he could. Though, there had not been enough force in it to throttle him.

There had probably been a reason why they had shown such consideration.

Subaru: "It's really not like you to care enough to not hurt me, nee-sama."

Ram: "It's not like Ram would bother using too much of my strength when looking at a fly trapped in the palm of my hand. This is the same as that… Though, it's not like Ram would purposely put one there. That would be disgusting."

Subaru: "Don't just say it and then deny it!"

[271] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Subaru speaks this sentence in Engrish before repeating the Japanese equivalent".

Subaru shrugged his shoulders at Ram's Ram-like phrasing. Standing in front of him, Ram softly clenched and unclenched the palm of her hand, checking its feel a few times.

Her gestures carried faint traces of bewilderment in them. This was quite the rare sight for Subaru, so used was he in seeing Ram always acting aloof.

It was quite a perk to witness her acting so perplexed and unsure of herself. It was only thanks to this that he could put up with the levels of exhaustion that were threatening to crush his entire body.

Subaru: "————"

Ram's body was constantly tormented by the burden of being "hornless". Subaru would take over this burden when employing Cor Leonis, which in turn gave her the extra strength that let her operate to her fullest.

Cor Leonis was one of their most essential tricks for beating this Tower.

Subaru had already given Ram a brief summary of what was happening to her, albeit setting aside the fine details.

Simply put, Ram's burdens were flowing into him, making Ram's body a lot lighter in those respects. However, since it strained him terribly, he desired a speedy settlement to the situation they were in. That was it, more or less.

Ram: "Now that I think about it, since it will be just you who is suffering, Barusu, Ram does not really care how long it will last."

Subaru: "But this is a joint effort between you and me, nee-sama. You must want to get this over as soon as possible when you think about it like that, right?"

Ram: "Yeah. It is repulsing."

Subaru: "Don't you think using repulse is going a little too far…"

Though, well, throwing abuse at him was so typical of her.

Subaru accepted that, all the while suppressing the urge to vomit. Ram stared at him, assuming her familiar pose with her arms folded in front of him.

Ram: "——Barusu. Ram will not be cutting any corners."

Subaru: "————"

Naturally, the more Ram moved using the full capabilities of her body, the greater the burden he would need to take, acting as its counterbalance. Even so, if he wanted to keep Ram in this state, he'd need to be prepared to take on all that extra burden.

Just her standing there breathing was already plenty to make him groan. And that was just the pain she experienced in her typical daily life.

Subaru: "Nee-sama is too kind, huh."

That was how the still-sleeping Rem would frequently assess her. He had not really understood it back then, but now he finally understood what she had meant.

If he were to let himself preface it in typical Ram fashion, it'd be something like, *that's how Ram goes about things*.

Ram: "Barusu?"

Subaru: "It's nothing—— Definitely don't take it easy of course. I can tell whether you're in serious mode or not by how much pain I'm in. What torture it is."

Ram: "So, you are saying your plan is the kind where the better Ram feels, the more you will suffer?"

Subaru: "I feel like I've just handed the switch to the nukes to the one person I shouldn't have."

Then again, if Subaru was to hand over the switch to the nukes to one of his compatriots, Ram was the only one he would consider for it.

Subaru: "Otto'd be a good bet as well, if not for the fact I'd worry he'd probably slip and push it accidentally… You're the most reliable in the sense of who'd use it properly, nee-sama."

Ram: “Hah! Flattery will get you nowhere… Listen, take good care of Emilia and Beatrice-sama. I care not what happens to you Barusu, since Ram knows you’re always a mess whatever the case.”

Subaru: “Yeahyeah, I know. And about Rem…”

Ram: “——The one who cares the most about Rem in this world, is Ram.”

Ram declared that as if she were stating a matter of course. Her crimson eyes narrowed as Subaru’s breath was taken away by the sheer intensity of her words.

Ram: “Let’s just say that it is enough that you, in your own Barusu-like way, are the person who cares about her the second-most in the world. Leaving it at that should not unsettle even a single hair on Rem’s head.”

Subaru: “…Yeah, or it’d make me want to die.”

Ram turned her back on Subaru after they had exchanged their feelings.

There were probably so many things that she wanted to say, words that she wanted to leave him, but she quickly changed her attitude, putting an end to them there.

That was truly how Ram went about things.

Ram: “Kindly take care of yourself as much as possible, Barusu. Otherwise, if you die, you will not be able to see Rem again.”

Subaru: “Yeah, I love you too.”

Subaru likewise replied jokingly to Ram’s facetious concerns.

And so, Subaru watched her run off into the distance saying nary a word, before then planting his feet firmly down onto the corridor and regrouping with Emilia and Beatrice who were waiting for him.

Subaru: “Sorry to keep you waiting. Let’s head out as well.”

Emilia: “Yeah, let’s do that. Will Ram be okay?”

Subaru: “Yeah, most likely. She’s Ram after all, so she’ll be fine… If I’d told her to do something really dumb, there’d be no way she wouldn’t have said anything about it.”

Beatrice: “You’ve gone and put a lot of trust in Ram again, I suppose.”

Subaru: “I trust you just as much, and on top of that, I love you way more. Don’t pout.”

Beatrice puffed out her cheeks as if she were saying “I’m not pouting, in fact!”. Subaru took her outstretched hand and then looked over at Emilia standing by his side. He wondered if she was worried about Ram going out on her own; however, her face in profile looked only slightly anxious.

Subaru: “Emilia-tan?”

Emilia: “No, it’s nothing. I just find that reaaally reassuring.”

Subaru: “——Coincidence as it may be, I actually feel the same.”

Emilia’s words did not have any grounds to them whatsoever, but for Subaru her words served as a great boost.

Their expectations far surpassed their anxieties. It was far more reassuring to have someone you could entrust, rather than have someone trusting in you. You could better face up against what lay ahead by believing, rather than clinging. Though it wasn’t like they’d solved any of their problems yet.

Subaru: “It’s only natural to believe in your companions, what’s more, you can believe in yourselves relying on them as well. Now’s the clearest our view’s gotten ever since we came to this sand-filled Tower.”

Beatrice: “——That look of yours, it’s Betty’s favorite kind of Subaru, I suppose.”

Beatrice looked at Subaru, who had encouragingly taken over things, and gave him an audacious smile. And then at Beatrice’s comment, Emilia brought a hand to her lips with a “Hehe”, causing Beatrice to point out Emilia’s reaction with a “What’s up with that, in fact”.

Emilia shook her head and then spoke up,

Emilia: “It doesn’t look like you remember, Beatrice, but I was thinking the exact same thing as you.”

△▼△▼△▼△

A huge creature was caught by its hind-legs and savagely swung around before being smashed against the walls and floor without relent.

???: “————”

This creature on the receiving end of these monstrous, unfathomable blows let out a hideous wail. A cacophony grated through the air that sounded like the wails of countless babies.

???: “————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

What was letting off those wretched cries was a repulsive, bizarre-looking Witchbeast—— One which, in accordance with his own knowledge, Natsuki Subaru had called the Centaur. However, that girl who’d been well acquainted with this kind of Witchbeast had once called it by a different name—— The Hungry Horse King.

Hungry Horse King: “————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

The Hungry Horse King’s massive body was hurled away, causing it to somersault through the balcony of the Tower of Sand. Having been knocked about by the impacts, the King of the Sand Sea instantly picked itself back up with flames spewing from its mane.

Its human upper-half brought forth two swords wreathed in flame. Using this completely un-Witchbeast-like dual-wielding sword art, the Horse King tried to fire off a scorching red blow at the being that had been piling on attacks at it. However——

???: “————”

A white ray of light pierced the Hungry Horse King as it attempted to swing its swords of flame, its fiery mane billowing. The impact caused this massive creature to falter back a fair few steps. However, it withstood it. It had withstood it. And just like that, the Horse King stepped forward again, preparing to launch its counterattack—— But the very next moment, the white ray of light exploded inside its body.

The ray of white light turned into a plethora of white rays, that shot out of the inside of the Horse King in all directions.

No matter how resilient a creature was, it could not escape death if all its vital organs within were destroyed. The Hungry Horse King was no exception to this rule as it brutally perished to the white rays of light.

???: “————”

And the slaughter of the woman who had been behind its death—— Shaula, did not cease there.

Swinging her braided brown hair about, Shaula powerfully kicked off the floor and leaped across the balcony floor. With light coming from her outstretched hands, she grabbed ahold of two enemies that were obstructing her path—— Witchbeasts, with lizard scales over ape-like bodies. From there, the light coming from her hands welled forth.

Had Subaru seen her blow, he would have probably dubbed it a “pile bunker”. The heads of the two monkeys she had grabbed by the face were obliterated by the white light she had shot, not even giving them a chance to fight back. She followed up by spinning around on the spot and using her long legs to knock down the monkeys bounding towards her. Her toes slammed into their faces, whacking them down to the floor with their heads caved in.

The stage where the battle between Shaula and the Witchbeasts was taking place, was the Fourth Floor of the Pleiades Watchtower. Although the balcony along the outer wall was built hundreds of meters above ground, there were quite a few Witchbeasts there that possessed wings, or could easily climb the wall.

She shot down the ones climbing one-by-one, the balcony soon becoming a sea of blood.

Shaula: “————”

Even after carrying out so much carnage, Shaula was not the least bit out of breath.

The total number of Witchbeasts that swarming towards the Pleiades Watchtower was so massive, that it would be pointless to count them. However, the fact that the Tower had not succumbed to their avalanche was in no doubt thanks to her overwhelming fighting strength.

Even so, the precarious equilibrium that Shaula was keeping was about to——

???: “——Shaula!”

Shaula: “Guh, uhhhhhhhh…!”

A shrill voice called out her name, but she did not answer back. With her face contorted in pain, she grabbed a winged Witchbeast that was flying towards her and smashed it down at her feet.

She followed up by piercing it with a white ray of light, giving bloom to flowers of red in midair, successfully putting an end to its pursuit. However, the state Shaula was in did not change as she drove them away. She clutched at her own face and stamped her feet down onto the floor.

Through the gap between Shaula’s fingers—— Her eyes, with their large pupils, were beginning to split apart and pulse a brilliant red. Her compound eyes were making their appearance, meaning Shaula was transforming.

Shaula: “Someone… Someone broke a rule…”

With her face covered by the palm of her hands, she met the approaching Witchbeasts in this destitute state. She fought off their attacks with her long legs, pulverizing their torsos with sharp back-kicks.

???: “This is bad. She is at her limit. Meili! How is it looking on your end…”

Meili: “It’s exactly how it looks, I’ve got my haaands full dealing with these flying children! If naked onee-san becomes unable to fight too, we’ll definitely, definitely be running short of haaands!”

???: “Guess so. This is looking fairly grim.”

Gazing at Shaula’s anguish, was a girl with wavy light-purple hair sporting a bleak look on her face, Anastasia—— or rather, Echidna, who was currently borrowing her body. Standing beside her was Meili as well, her dark-blue ponytail swaying about as she somehow kept the scales tipped in their favor by using her Divine Protection.

The trio of Shaula, Echidna and Meili were the team resisting with all their might to keep the Witchbeasts from approaching the Pleiades Watchtower. However, unlike Meili with her Divine Protection of Fiend

Manipulation[272] and Shaula with her predisposition for pure firepower, Echidna's presence was pretty much worthless.

She was reluctant to go back to Taygeta, but at the same time, she wanted to avoid retreating further into the Tower which was in a state of turbulence, where she would only end up being an unnecessary burden.

"Anastasia": "Calm down, now is not the time for that…"

She moved her slender fingers and focused her awareness at the Od inside her—— though strictly speaking, at the Od inside Anastasia's body. Anastasia's Gate possessed a flaw, in which it was unable to take in any Mana. That was why she could only cast magic with her natural Od.

In other words, it was tantamount to cutting Anastasia's lifespan. Therefore, it was a measure that not even Echidna wanted to take, other than when her life was truly in danger.

But better to take action than just sit around waiting for death. At least, that was what the Anastasia she knew would think.

Everyone had to use the cards they were dealt with, and thus, victory was determined by the way one played their cards.

"Anastasia": "————"

The change afflicting Shaula was most likely due to something that was rooted in her core.

Something that definitely could not be overridden, existing as a kind of shackle on her. As an Artificial Spirit, Echidna understood that all too well, considering she was in similar shoes. There was not anything anyone could do through force of will.

[272] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "The «魔» character in «魔操» (as in, «魔操の加護», the full name of Meili's Divine Protection) is most likely referring to the character in «魔獣» (Witchbeast) rather than the more generic «magic» or «demon» nuance it has. Translating it in English is tricky due to language limitations". Personally I think that Divine Protection of Magic Manipulation, the original translation choice, does not make much sense considering the localization for Witchbeast here. So I think "fiend" gives that "evil" connotation from "魔", but doesn't fully commit to a localization that goes along the common localization of "Mabeasts" nor "Witchbeasts". Obviously, doing it as "Witch Manipulation" is a gigantic jump as well.

If what she had said before was true, then the rules of Pleiades Watchtower had been broken. She needed to act as the Watchtower's keeper to remedy that.

The reason she was resisting so hard was because, in the depths of her heart, she did not want to harm them in actual fact—— or rather, she probably did not want to harm Natsuki Subaru.

"Anastasia": "…It is ironic."

Thanks to her staying on as the keeper of this Watchtower, she had been able to reunite with the one person she had wished to meet.

Yet because of her continued presence as its keeper, she could not go against her orders to harm him—— Truly the sorrow of being a creation.

In its truest sense, Echidna thought that probably only she and Beatrice, with her also being a creation, could comprehend the pain she was in.

That was why she——

???: "——DRYAHHHHHHHH!!"

Echidna caught a glimpse of the silhouette of a person rushing out from the corridor that led from the balcony to the Tower, letting out a vigorous yell. Her eyes mutely widened in surprise, her breath taken away from her.

△▼△▼△▼△

Subaru felt shocked the moment he had rushed out onto the balcony, witnessing the differences between what it had usually looked like and the present situation. He immediately realized that a fierce battle was taking place here.

Subaru: "————"

The balcony of the Fourth Floor had turned into a sea of blood, with countless Witchbeast cadavers scattered about.

This best seat in the house, where one could enjoy an unbroken view of the Sand Sea, was now dyed in blood thanks to the countless Witchbeasts ceaselessly charging at it. If left unchecked, they would get into the Tower and mayhem would ensue.

And, the biggest contributor in preventing this damage from spreading was——

Subaru: "——Shaula!"

Shaula: "Master…?"

Shaula turned around at the sound of Subaru's yell—— Her eyes were about to split apart and divide into her six compound eyes, three on the left, three on the right.

He had already witnessed this transformation process of hers with his own eyes. It meant that the rules of Pleiades Watchtower had been broken and Shaula's time had come to take up her duty as the Watchtower's keeper.

This would culminate in Shaula transforming into the titanic scorpion against her will, where she would then set about annihilating the challengers inside the Tower—— in other words, Subaru and his group. That was why——

Shaula: "Master, please… Please order me…!"

Subaru: "————"

Shaula: "Someone broke the rules. At this rate, Master… I'll end up ki…! If you can't, you know, before I do that, I'll… I'll…!"

Shaula clutched her body tightly as she sought Subaru's orders with a look of desperation set on her face.

Her capacity for self-suicide seemed to have been instinctively robbed from her. What she was beseeching for here was one final push to kill her.

Shaula would throw away her life without any hesitation if Subaru were to say it. It could safely be said that the threat of the giant scorpion would be gone, so long as he gave the command.

Thus, Subaru nodded his head firmly,

Subaru: “Shaula.”

Shaula: “Y… es… If it’s for you Master, I’ll…”

Subaru: “I’m getting sick of telling you this, but I haven’t got a clue why you’re calling me Master.”

Shaula: “——Hk.”

The instant Subaru replied right back at her, Shaula’s compound eyes became tinged with despair.

After four-hundred years of waiting in vain, she had finally been able to meet him again. But to have that denied by him, and after all that, even have her last wish trampled on, led to her feeling as frightened as a child.

Subaru took a deep breath, and then let it out as he gazed on at her trepidation.

Subaru: “That’s why we’ll talk about whether I’m your Master or not later, as well as if I’ll admit to it.”

Shaula: “Eh…”

Subaru: “I’m not going to tell you to die. There’s no way I’m going to let you keep crying. There’s absolutely no way I’m going to let your four-hundred years end here.”

He had spent quite some time scraping up the Memories he had temporarily lost, so he knew all too well.

The patience people had in this world was insane. Four-hundred years they would spend waiting in earnest for someone. He really needed to drag out these people they wanted to meet, even if it meant grabbing them by the scruff of their necks.

Subaru: “I’ll just do it myself! As if I’m going to willingly do what someone else tells me! Bring it on, oh inevitable fate!”

Shaula: “————”

Subaru raised his fist up above him while he firmly declared that, leaving Shaula speechless upon that sight. Yet at the same time, the unbearable urge going on inside her seemed to be about to burst.

But, at least in that precise moment for her, that which mattered were not the rules of the Tower or the explosive urge to swell up from within,

Shaula: “Master… I love you.”

Such it would seem were her emotions of uncontrollable love she held for the person she had longed for all these four-hundred years.

Shaula: “————”

Straight after she had proclaimed her love, Shaula’s transformation began in earnest.

Her pale, slender hands swelled up, and morphed into giant pincers. Her feminine, voluptuous body burst open, scattering flesh and blood which then formed back, like a tape rewinding, remolding her body anew. A jet-black shell grew there as her bright red compound eyes glared down at the world. Her many legs pierced into the floor, and so the warden of the Tower of Sand was completed——

Shaula: “——Bishaaan!!”

The foreboding figure of the giant scorpion let out a shrill warning cry at the rule-breakers who had violated the Tower rules. The first thing its compound eyes settled on was, ironically enough, the black-haired young man that the previous version had obsessed over.

It aimed at him, ready to unleash its devastating blow——

???: “——HIYAAAAAAAA!!”

——Yet a thunderous flying kick drove into the giant scorpion’s body from the side.

The kick carried a tremendous amount of power, enough to lift the giant scorpion’s huge body up from the floor and blow it back. It hurtled across the stone floor, collecting Witchbeasts on its way, before flying off the edge of the balcony out into the skies over the sand sea.

However, the giant scorpion was not going to just do nothing about it. She hurriedly thrust her outstretched stinger into the wall of the Watchtower, tossing its massive body up, twisting its body midair as it desperately tried to get back to the balcony.

???: “——Murak.”

What prevented it from making its way back was a single chanted word.

This direction-imbued Mana interfered with the reality around them, bringing about effects into the world that would not normally occur on their own. This time, its effect had been to block the giant scorpion’s return.

The scorpion was caught by a gust of wind as it desperately tried to land on the balcony. Its body was swept back by the sandy breeze, sending it far off trajectory.

How strong a turbulence would it have to be, for it to blow away the scorpion’s colossal body? It was utterly massive, weighing at least several hundred kilograms. Though, things were not as they seemed.

Murak was a kind of Yin Magic that manipulated the gravity tugging at its target.

To put it briefly, it was quite natural that its body had ended up unable to move as it normally did, considering it now weighed as much as a speck of dust. That was all there was to it.

Shaula: “——Bishaaan!!”

The giant scorpion let out a pained cry before being thrown back once again from the balcony. Immediately, it swung its stinger in an attempt to snipe those in the Tower, having given up on getting back.

But that came a step too late.

Meili: “Feathered Mole-chan!”

The girl’s imposing command gave way to a rush of blows that hurtled towards the giant scorpion as it blew away in the breeze. Witchbeasts, with what seemed to be bird feathers sprouting from them and most of their heads morphed into a horn, dove towards her. One-by-one, they shot themselves straight at the scorpion’s shell. And although they did not damage it, they were still able to push her further and further away with each impact, keeping her away from the Tower.

Shaula: “————”

Even as great of a scorpion as she was, she was not going to be able to shift her body weight around without something to support her. Just like that, after the wind had blown her away, the magic was canceled, making her fall headlong towards the ground.

They were hundreds of meters above ground, but she was not the kind of opponent who would be done in by something like that. Though, it sufficed as a means for buying time, thus he would make use of this brief reprieve.

Subaru: “Meili! Echidna!”

“Anastasia”: “Natsuki-kun! You have pulled yourself together… Yeah?”

Echidna looked up with a frown as Subaru rushed over to her. Then with a pensive look adorning Anastasia’s face, she continued her words,

“Anastasia”: “Perchance, have you gotten your Memories back?”

Subaru: “This is going to save me a lot of time! Though how did you know?”

“Anastasia”: “It is obvious. Otherwise, Beatrice would not be sporting such a proud look next to you.”

Echidna jerked her chin at Beatrice, who was looking rather smug as she held Subaru’s hand.

Indeed, it was plain as day that Beatrice’s mood had lifted for the better. Plus, the fact that she could not hide this show of emotion of hers was really lovely.

Of course Echidna’s insight was superb as well, no mistake about that. Following from it, she shifted her gaze to look behind Subaru—— at Emilia, who had delivered a flying kick to the giant scorpion just before.

“Anastasia”: “And this girl I do not recognize…?”

Subaru: “It’s due to the Authority of Gluttony. She’s victim to it, just like Julius is… They’re all forgotten, other than by the person themselves. Her name is Emilia. My tough, yet adorable princess.”

“Anastasia”: “I appreciate you getting me up to speed so quickly, even so, the Tower, both inside and outside, is an utter mess. Would you mind if I were to ask you what we will do about it?”

Subaru: “You can, I’ve already got an answer ready for that.”

Subaru gave her a deep nod. Behind him, Emilia spread her arms out and sent countless shards of ice up into the air. She waited a moment and then unleashed them all, their ferocious power tearing through the Witchbeasts soaring through the skies, as well as those on the ground.

Although Subaru could not see it from where he was, they had certainly also pierced into the giant scorpion who had fallen beneath. Yet her attack had only been a drop in the ocean with all these Witchbeasts they had in front of them——

Subaru: “Echidna, you’re going to take over inside! First, you’re going to meet back up with Julius on the Second Floor where he’s fighting! I’ve told Emilia what to do after that!”

“Anastasia”: “——I have no issues leaving together with her, but what are you and Beatrice going to do, Natsuki-kun?”

Beatrice: “Betty and Subaru’s roles are already set, in fact.”

Echidna hesitated for a moment before giving her answer. Beatrice replied back before raising her eyes up in admiration to look at Subaru’s face in profile, firmly giving his hand a squeeze.

Beatrice: “We’re going to deal with that giant scorpion here, I suppose. We’re going to have to go easy on her, so that we don’t accidentally kill her, what a bother, in fact.”

Subaru: “She sure talks big doesn’t she. That’s my Beako for you.”

Beatrice: “Blehhhh, I suppose.”

After voicing out her boasts, as if trying to rouse both herself and her Contractor, Beatrice stuck her tongue out.

Echidna’s eyes grew wider as she witnessed their exchange, followed by a shake of her head. Rather than wasting time arguing, it would better for her to believe that this was the best way to go about things, and commit to it.

Indeed, it was so typical of Anastasia to have that instinct that allowed her to make split second decisions.

“Anastasia”: “There is no doubting that your opinions have come as a great help for us pretty much everywhere inside this Tower. That is why… it seems to me that handing this place over to you would give us our best chances of winning.”

Subaru: “I feel honored. Though I can’t help but feel bad that you’ve ended up with Echidna’s name.”

“Anastasia”: “Regarding the matter of the deep influence my creator has, I would like to find an opportunity to have a proper discussion about this after we settle things—— Is there anything you want me to pass on to Julius?”

Subaru: “————”

Echidna tacked that question onto the end, just before she turned her back to leave.

Subaru could still sense Julius fighting a floor above them using the effects of Cor Leonis—— Now that he thought about it, this meant that he had met back up with all of his friends inside the Tower, bar him.

Given that Julius had also been really worried about him back when he had lost his memories, Subaru wondered whether he needed to tell him that he had gotten them back. However——

Subaru: “Nope, not really.”

He had no words that he needed to tell Julius Juukulius, who lay locked in combat with Reid Astrea.

After all, Subaru’s plan had been to assign the best people to their most suitable posts amidst this dismal state of affairs. That was why he had gone around talking to them, after all, he had needed to reshuffle their roles. However, he did not need to do that for Julius.

——Because his post lay nowhere else but against Reid Astrea.

Subaru: “At this point, I can literally only say «attaboy» to him. He’d still end up going to Reid, even if I didn’t mention anything.”

Thanks to that, he had been able to talk with Shaula before she had transformed into the giant scorpion.

The familiar words of love she had uttered in the end had provided Subaru with a boundless strength. A fire had been lit in his heart upon telling her that he would definitely, definitely help her. So, that was why——

Subaru: "——Everything I needed to say has already been said by the previous me, as well as the me a little before that. I don't have anything else to add now. He's Julius Juukulius, after all."

Natsuki Subaru fully acknowledged that an unyielding "fate" existed in this world.

The many problems shrouding the Watchtower were impossible to avoid, they would always rear their ugly heads at them. But, being unavoidable and unsurmountable were two completely different stories.

If it were fate for Reid Astrea to stand against Julius, then what came beyond that was also inevitable.

The one who would slay Reid Astrea reborn, was Julius Juukulius.

"Anastasia": "——I see. I will just tell him that as-is then."

Subaru: "Oh wait, there's something. Since everyone's having a hard time here, tell him to hurry his ass and settle things there, then come give *sukedachi*[273] to the others."

Subaru waved at Echidna as she began to rush off to her duties with a strained smile on her face. After seeing her off, he turned towards Emilia, who was busy cutting down a pair of Witchbeasts with a sword of ice, over by where Echidna was heading to.

Subaru: "Emilia-tan! It's going to be just as we discussed! I'm counting on you, Emilia-tan!"

Emilia: "Mhm, leave it to me! You're the one who mustn't die here, Subaru!"

Subaru: "Of course I won't!"

Emilia's words were only natural, however, they had made Subaru raise his fist, feeling more overwhelmed than usual.

[273] Engrish flip. Means "assistance/backup (in a fight)" (助太刀), originally "フォロー" (follow, but in the sense of backup here).

He did not want to die—— The reason for that remained unchanged, but now he had more reasons as to why he needed to avoid it at all costs. The dangers of Returning by Death in this situation were nigh unspeakable.

If his restart point had not changed, then he would return to a point before he had separated Louis Arneb, along with her Witch Factor, from himself. As for what kind of trouble that would bring, neither he, nor anyone else, could know.

Would Louis vanish from Subaru's body or not? The Hall of Memories lay somewhat out of the normal scheme of things, so he did not know whether it would avoid the effects of his Return by Death. Everything was so unclear. So, that meant——

Subaru: "——This time, we're going to settle things here!"

Following Subaru's affirmation, Emilia grabbed ahold of Echidna and left the balcony. The girls would be going to their respective field of battle, and likewise, so would Subaru and his group.

Meili: "Whaaat now? All of that sounded like gibberish to meee, any chance you could explain things to me proooperly?"

Meili had been patient and not interrupted his conversation with Echidna. But she had called out to him upon noticing that only he and Beatrice had remained on the balcony.

Subaru gave her a thumbs up and flashed her a devilish smile, displaying his teeth.

There had been only one reason why Subaru had not called out to Meili in these last moments—— like Julius, she was already in her ideal field of battle.

Subaru: "I'm sorry Meili, but you're going to be joining us. Me, you and Beako are going to be holding down two of these corners—— the giant scorpion and the swarm of Witchbeasts!"

Meili: "That's really not much of an explaaanation!"

Beatrice: "——Here she comes, in fact!"

He did not have the time to give Meili a more detailed explanation as she gave a swing of her braided hair with a puff of her cheeks. The very next instant, a massive creature jumped up from the outer wall of the Tower onto the balcony, as if in response to what Beatrice had said.

The creature had a jet-black shell, red compound eyes, and ferocious looking pincers——

Subaru: "So, you're a four-hundred-year old *hikikomori*[274], yeah?"

Subaru let out a quick sigh before nimbly picking Beatrice up by his side, and snuggling her into his arms. Then, along with Meili who had rushed over to join them, they came face-to-face with the giant scorpion.

Faced with their enemy who was still silently glaring at them, he gave a small smile,

Subaru: "This is a *hikikomori* showdown. She over there clocks in at four-hundred years, whereas us two over here clock in at four-hundred-and-one."

Meili: "Isn't four-hundred-and-two more cooorrect when you count all three of us?"

Subaru: "In other words, we're gonna win!"

Beatrice: "I don't get what any of this means, other than the part you said about winning, I suppose!!"

Held within his arms, Beatrice shouted at Subaru and Meili for joking about together. And just like that, surrounded by just the right amount of tension, he glared at the giant scorpion and let out a sigh.

Now things had shaped up to become his foreseen matchups. All that was left now——

Subaru: "——I'm seriously counting on you, Emilia-tan. You're the key to everything."

——The battle against the four corners enclosing Pleiades Watchtower had officially begun.

[274] Meaning NEET, aka shut-ins that never leave their room.

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Norvak (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 79 – READY STEADY GO

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 4 “Ready, Steady, Go”, Parts 7-10

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ice/Ice_Occultism, Ringo) — Complete

The giant scorpion was the one to fire off the first blow to start the battle.

Shaula: “————”

Its red compound eyes glittered brightly, and immediately afterwards, a white ray of light gushed forth from its swinging tail.

What was terrifying about that, was that its blow, meant as a fatal one for them, had been fired off without even one of its typical cries. With nary even a hiss, the giant scorpion nonchalantly rained death down towards them.

Subaru had tons of bad memories associated with that white light. Specifically, he had been killed by it in around half of his fifteen-plus attempts inside the Tower.

Nevertheless, given that he had been killed so much by it, he did learn a thing or two, despite how much he despised it. Namely——

Subaru: “The time it takes to charge up, and the signs it shows when it’s about to attack…!”

The scorpion’s compound eyes and stinger both glowed a smidgen more when it was about to unleash an attack. These signs were subtle to the point he would thought he was just seeing things, but this eye for survival was what Subaru had developed through his mortal trial and errors.

Making full use of it, Subaru ran with Beatrice in his arms, taking it upon himself to close the gap between them and the giant scorpion. Reason being——

Subaru: “Its charging speed is pretty damn slow…!”

With a twist of his body, he dodged the white ray of light that had welled forth as he said that.

Even though the ray of light had been dubbed slow, it was still much faster than a pitch performed by a shoddy high-school baseball player. Fortunately though, he was confident in his ability to tell whether a pitch was good or not. And in any case, there was no way he was going to stay alive without being able to do that.

A great man had once said that life was all about trial and error. Though, he probably had not been envisioning these life-or-death situations when he had said that.

Even so, one would learn by making mistakes. That was an immutable truth. Subaru, “luckily”, had the ability to go through trial and error in life or death situations.

He had made full use of that to find his eye for survival—— Thus, this was Natsuki Subaru’s arena.

Subaru: “I’m sorry for not being able to live up to all your expectations, other me[275]!”

Subaru dished out a heartfelt apology to his other self who had sought out an almighty Natsuki Subaru. It was like he was saying to them, “I’m sorry for only being able to fight dirty”. Beatrice though, still held tightly in between his arms, dancing this jig of life and death with him, reacted with a snorted “Hmph”,

Beatrice: “What are you talking about, in fact. You’ve never failed to live up to our expectations, I suppose.”

Speaking up, Beatrice then raised her hand up in a flash. From her thin lips, she chanted the word “Murak”; a kind of Yin Magic that tampered with the law of gravity.

The giant scorpion had once been hit with its effects and pushed far away below them. So this time, the scorpion braced its jet-black shell and planted its legs firmly as to prevent the same from happening once more.

[275] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Subaru, in fact, refers to himself using «俺» here. I opted to use «other me» purely because it sounds crisper in English, but he literally is just saying «me».”

However——

Meili: “You’re just playing into my hands if you’re going to stay stiiill!”

A barrage of Witchbeasts began to assail the unmoving giant scorpion.

The strange-looking Witchbeasts Meili had ordered the attack from were called “Feathered Moles”. They looked like what one would get if they crossed wings and horns together. And just like bullets that held no fear of death, they shot towards the giant scorpion and struck its tough shell with their horns without vacillation. The sounds of them crashing against it overlapped with the sounds of shattering.

The giant scorpion writhed in pain and raised its large pincers in retaliation.

???: “————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

What followed the attack in their stead was the most bizarre of all bizarre-looking figures. A being that was the very manifestation of a nightmare-ridden night, a centaur, a cross between man and horse. The Hungry Horse King.

The terrible wail of babies swept through the Watchtower’s balcony. Along with it came a grating roar that made him want to cover his ears up, and then a burst of flames which violently filled the area around them, almost all the way up to the sky.

Hungry Horse King: “————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

The Hungry Horse King did not hesitate, and thrust its fiery spear right into the heart of the flames. Its red-hot tip would land a critical hit that would burn through even the scorpion’s iron-like shell.

The giant scorpion was overwhelmingly strong when it came to plain fighting strength. However, that did not mean attacks would not work against it. It felt pain if struck, just like any living creature.

It felt pain if struck. If struck.

Subaru: “————”

Thus, the giant scorpion embodied the sort of mantra of everything being hunky-dory so long as it was not hit.

It caught the fiery spear with one of its enormous pincers and severed the Hungry Horse King's arm in one swoop. The Horse King tried to regenerate its wound, but it had been ruthlessly cauterized by its own fiery spear. The squirming, bubbling flesh of its wound trying to regenerate itself stopped in its tracks.

Subaru had been able to obtain an unnecessary tidbit from this, namely, that it would not be able to regenerate its burnt wounds. The Hungry Horse King was now stopped in its tracks, but then, the giant scorpion's stinger went off with a bang into the Hungry Horse King's body, causing its large body to burst open from within.

Hungry Horse King: "————"

Flesh and blood scattered everywhere, and along with it, the Hungry Horse King's life as well.

Even the Feathered Moles who'd smashed against the scorpion's shell had ended up dead when their horn, which was fused with their head, broke. The way they fought by tragically throwing away their lives was one that could naturally be cursed as utterly barbaric.

It would be wrong of Subaru to close his eyes to this and dismiss it as there being no problem because they were Witchbeasts. However, he also was not planning on glossing things over with all lives being created equally.

Life had value to it, and without a doubt, there were differences in their values.

There were clear differences in the way he felt about the weight of the lives of those who were precious to him and those who were not. He would not hide that behind any deceptions. That was why he would make full use of the Witchbeasts' lives to win this fight. Therefore——

Subaru: "Though you're doing the right thing overlooking me, you're still making a big mistake!"

With the Witchbeast vanguard repelled, Subaru confidently stepped through the floor which was now coated red. Carrying Beatrice in his left arm, he drew out his whip with his right and swung it up.

Dubbed the Guiltywhip, its blasphemous finishing touches had been done using the corpse of his former foe—— Natsuki Subaru cracked it through the air, his super-quick whiplash scoring a direct hit on the titanic scorpion's shell.

The scorpion let out a thunderous cry and glared at Subaru with its red compound eyes. There were no signs that he had caused any damage to it, nor that it was feeling any pain.

But he was fine with that. His aim had not been to inflict any damage on it. That had probably been why it had put off dealing with Subaru until last, after the other Witchbeasts.

The great scorpion's decision was both right, and wrong.

Subaru: "WHRAAAAAAA——!!"

Beatrice: "We caught a big one, in fact!!"

His whip had snared itself around the scorpion's shell, and with that, the scorpion's massive body would shoot up once he tugged with all his might, thanks to the recoil. This was made possible by the fact that the effects of Beatrice's Yin Magic were still in play, drastically decreasing the weight of the titanic beast.

The giant scorpion immediately tried to plant itself firmly on the ground, however, the vast quantities of blood and entrails at its feet made the conditions extremely poor for getting a firm grip. Subaru reeled the scorpion up in one swoop as it tried to cling onto the floor with its sharp talons.

From an outsider's perspective, the situation almost looked like Subaru was swinging the giant beast about using some form of superhuman strength. But this grandiose spectacle on display had only been made possible thanks to Beatrice's help; and so, he kept swinging the giant scorpion's body as much as he could with his whip, until finally, he hurled it away.

Subaru: "*BOOON VOOOOYAGE*——!!"

The giant scorpion's body spun around in midair, carrying its super-giant swinging momentum.

As it spun around uncontrollably, it tried to hit Subaru with a white ray of light, showing pinpoint targeting. However, Beatrice raised her hand up to knock it away.

She materialized glowing purple crystals in midair, and used them to shoot the white ray of light down head-on. As their coordination sprung to life, Subaru released the giant scorpion from his whip, and it flew away towards the sky once more.

Subaru: “This should buy us more…”

Time, Subaru said, having found a reprieve out of this mess with this precarious attack, although he had to allow some concessions to win out in the end. However, before he could finish what he was saying, his eyes widened in surprise.

Right before his eyes, the giant scorpion began to perform an astonishing feat of acrobatics as it hurtled away.

Shaula: “————”

With a slash from its enormous pincers, it severed its own tail at the root. Just like that, its tail flew away, scattering dark-red bodily fluids in its wake. Yet, a white ray of light was fired off from the very tip of it.

It slammed against the now-tailless scorpion and blew it back towards the balcony of the Watchtower with tremendous force. All that work in making it lighter and practically weightless—— and now it had made it back to the balcony, bringing a shockwave with it. It dug its enormous pincers into the floor to stop its momentum, before then pointing its glare at them.

Subaru: “T-those were some acrobatics you did. But if that means you’ve lost your tail, then all the better for us…”

Shaula: “————”

Subaru: “Like, heyheyHEYHEY!”

The giant scorpion had landed and lowered its body, putting itself on-guard as more darkish-red blood poured out from its tail. But that did not mean its wound had not gotten any deeper. Quite the opposite in fact—— Its severed tail was regrowing from its stump.

And it was not only its tail. The cracks in its shell that had originated from firing the white ray of light at itself, as to blow it back, were also bubbling away, visibly being filled in as well.

Subaru: “It’s tough, smart, and heals, aren’t we just getting more and more of these un-Shaula like features!?”

Healing aside, Shaula's body was soft, and she was not in the least bit smart. Nevertheless, the giant scorpion had shed all these traits and was now coming at them with its overwhelming killing power.

It haphazardly swung its newly-grown tail about, releasing its stingers all around it into its surroundings. Its attack was a ranged one, that showed no signs of its typical tells, so it was safe to say that it was the worst kind of attack for Subaru and Beatrice to be subjected to, given how much they lacked in strength.

Subaru: "Whoooooaaaa——!?"

Beatrice: "Guh… Subaru, we'll have to fly, I suppose!!"

They had no means to escape from the white rays of light the scorpion had fired off, at least on *terra firma*. That said, a means of escape had presented itself in the skies. Beatrice quickly released her magic from the scorpion, then cast it back, this time to Subaru.

Subaru kicked off from the ground and jumped up into the air with all his might, trusting in his partner, regardless of whether her magic would actually work. The white rays of light began to shatter the balcony, with one of them just barely grazing his feet.

Subaru: "That was really close…"

Beatrice: "Don't speak so soon, in fact…!"

They had literally jumped over the possibility of death, but they had no time for relief.

The same thing as before had happened, when Subaru and Beatrice had laid their attack onto the giant scorpion. Escaping up to the skies meant that they had lost both their foothold and escape route—— All that was left for them was to be destroyed by one of the scorpion's attacks.

Subaru: "Beako! *Dokujina mahou*[276], part two——!"

Although this trump card could only be used three times a day, there was no way they could risk messing up by not using it and dying as a result. The moment Subaru squeezed her shoulders tightly, Beatrice came to the same conclusion as well.

[276] Engrish flip. Means "unique/original magic technique" (独自な魔法), originally "オリジナルスペル" (original spell).

She would have their special technique ready for deployment in a jiffy, which would make Subaru invincible for a set amount of time——

???: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

Subaru: "Whoa!?"

Beatrice: "Whaaa!?"

She and Subaru were grabbed from the side before she could cast the technique. Simultaneously, a white ray of light passed through the space they had been in a moment prior, almost evaporating them.

The only thing that had saved them from that demise, and was keeping them from being pursued by the great scorpion was——

Subaru: "T-that was close. What even happened… Geh!?"

Beatrice: "I suppose!?"

Subaru checked to see what was going on as he clung on to something rubbery, and his voice caught in astonishment; likewise, Beatrice next to his bosom also had quite the frown on her face.

This was because the one who had saved them from the giant scorpion's attack, and was still giving it their all to protect them, was a mauve-colored, vicious-looking Witchbeast. A Hungry Horse King.

Subaru: "I never thought we'd be here fighting together at the *kakyou*[277] when I first saw you down in the underground!"

Hungry Horse King: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

In reply to Subaru's bluff, the Hungry Horse King let out an ear-splitting cry. His face tensed up at that; then, another Hungry Horse King pulled over next to them. Clinging to that Horse King's back was Meili's small body.

[277] Engrish flip. Means "most interesting part of a story/climax" (佳境), originally "クライマックス" (climax). Please, Subaru, stop spamming Engrish so much.

Meili: “It looked to me like you were about to pull out your trump card, weeeren’t you? Try to be a liiittle more careful. Onii-san’s and Beatrice-chan’s trump card is a lifeline for me as well after aaall!”

Subaru: “*Nisu sabu*! *Yoi sukedachi*[278]! You did well Meili! Can we change the field of battle at this rate?”

Meili: “You mean, you want us to chaaange locations? I sure can, buuut…”

Subaru: “Then please go for it! We have too few escape routes here for starters!”

Scanning the surroundings, Subaru decided to beat a retreat from the balcony, since there were not many places left to stand on. Tons of Witchbeast corpses were already littered about there, and with how things were, weird accidents would be prone to happen.

Meili gave some thought to the efficiency of his decision and then nodded, clapping the Hungry Horse Kings on the back with a “Please”. As soon as they heard her words, the two Horse Kings picked up their pace and jumped down from the balcony, onto the wall of the Watchtower. They began to run down it without wasting any time, at breakneck speeds.

Subaru: “AHHHHHHHH——!?”

Beatrice: “WABABABABABABA, IN FACT!?”

Subaru and Beatrice yelled out in tandem, hugging each other as they faced this unexpected rough ride. At the same time though, he could only take his hat off at Meili, for being able to tame Hungry Horse Kings of all things and have them appended to their ranks.

Subaru: “————”

With the supremely-powerful Hungry Horse Kings at their head, the Feathered Moles flying through the skies, the colossal Sand Earthworms, the Courtesan Bears and other countless Witchbeasts on the ground as their allies, they had quite a wide range of strategies available to them.

[278] Engrish flip. Means “nice assistance/backup (in a fight)” (よい助太刀), originally “ナイスフォロー” (nice follow). The “nice save” is also Engrish, hence why it’s “corrupted”. And yes I’m dying on the inside at this point.

It could be said that they were the ideal partners for Subaru, since his plan was to keep stalling for time by dishing out one delay tactic after the other.

Subaru: “We’re really being spoilt for choice with how many ways we have to attack! Meili! You and I may be way more compatible than I’d ever thought!”

Meili: “Dooon’t say that, onii-san. I really wouldn’t want Petra-chan and Beatrice-chan glaaaring at me!”

As they galloped down the Watchtower in vertical fashion, Subaru exchanged shouts with Meili, the latter clinging onto the Hungry Horse King’s back. The latter gave Subaru a sullen frown in response to his casual chit-chat as she clung onto her Hungry Horse King’s back. Her reaction slightly hurt his innocent male sensibilities, but right now was the time to ignore such trivial wounds.

Subaru: “Round two’s gonna start when we drop onto the sand sea. She’s going to come after me! So for the time being, she shouldn’t interfere with anyone inside the Tower…”

Meili: “Buuut, we’re still stuck without a way to beat her, yeah? No matter how much time we spend running around, we’re not going to be able to grab a win, riiight?”

Since they were in the Augria Sand Dunes, they had Witchbeasts in endless supply. Thus their Witchbeast ammo was never going to run out. However, all that gave them was the ability to continue waging their battle, rather than a surefire way to beat the scorpion.

Subaru: “————”

Glacing over at Meili, sweat was dripping from her forehead, which she was wiping away at, and her breaths were slightly labored.

That was in part due to how strained she was, being caught smack-dab in between the hammer and anvil that was the battlefield. However, he could not help but think that it was also in part due to the feedback she received from controlling Witchbeasts. Though this was something which Subaru could not really comprehend since he did not hold a Divine Protection, there was enough of a chance for a Divine Protection to become poison when overused.

Subaru: “Otto did joke about this, saying stuff like the world being hellish back when he couldn’t control his Divine Protection…”

Maybe those words that Otto had spluttered out when drunk were nothing to sneeze at.

If Divine Protections became burdensome like Otto had said, then there would be a limit to how much Meili could fight as well. Their defeat would instantly be set in stone were Meili to fall in battle. In other words——

Subaru: “Indeed, this battle will be decided by how much I coddle Meili as a princess——!”

Beatrice: “What an inexcusable plan, I suppose!”

Right after Beatrice raised her eyebrows in response to Subaru’s declaration, a shock ran through their entire bodies. It served as a sign that the Hungry Horse Kings had reached their final stop after running down the Tower at breakneck speeds.

Meaning they had broken past the vertical wall of the Watchtower, and had once again arrived at the sand sea.

Subaru: “It’s not like it’s gone anywhere at the end of the day… But when you drop down to it like this, it feels way more different.”

Beatrice: “How does it feel, in fact?”

Subaru: “Absolutely awful, I hate how deserts are just full of sand. It reminds me of how I never liked the desert stages you often got in games as well.”

Sometimes, depending on the game’s system, the HP of his character would start ticking down by doing nothing but walking in the searing heat. This sand sea had nothing to do with the scorching sand he would find there, but even so, he did not have any fond memories of it.

Made all the worse by the fact that they were surrounded by countless swarms of Witchbeasts.

Subaru: “Though, I know they aren’t going to attack us…”

A sickly-sweet aroma that made him want to wrinkle his nose was wafting about, accompanied by a far worse beastly stench; he could pretty much say that the air around the sand sea was one of the crummiest in the world. Though, with the environment being filled with tons of Witchbeasts, some familiar, others not, perhaps Witchbeast researchers or whatever would drool over that?

Unfortunately, it only made Subaru and his team feel uneasy.

Meili: “Sooo, what’s your answer to my question?”

Meili rode her Hungry Horse King over to Subaru and Beatrice as the former shuddered. She wanted an answer to her question, to which Subaru glanced up at the Tower, and then replied,

Subaru: “It’s as you say, we can’t do anything about the giant scorpion… about Shaula. That’s why Emilia-tan holds the key to everything.”

Meili: “Are you talking about that silver-haired onee-san from earlier?”

Subaru: “Yeah. Emilia-tan and the fifth rule are the key to everything.”

Subaru gave the puzzled Meili a nod before sticking his palm up in front of her. He spread out all five of his fingers, marking the rules imposed on them as challengers of the Pleiades Watchtower.

Subaru: “We can’t leave without completing the Examinations. We can’t break the rules of the Examinations. We aren’t allowed to disrespect the Libraries. We mustn’t damage the Tower. And finally…”

Meili: “Hm?”

Meili should have heard the first four rules.

But she did not know the fifth. Shaula had been trying to hide it, so only Subaru, who had Returned by Death, knew what it was. As well as Shaula herself, of course.

The fifth rule that Shaula had zipped her lips shut and refused to tell them. That was——

Subaru: “——It is not forbidden to destroy the Examinations. Meaning we can destroy the rules of this Tower.”

As challengers, the Examinations constrained their actions. At the same time though, the rules also constrained Shaula’s actions since she was one of their Examiners.

Shaula was bound by the rules of the Tower. So, even though she did not want to kill them, she could not escape from the fate that bound her to try and do so through her giant scorpion transformation.

If that was the shackle that had been binding her for over four hundred years, then——

Beatrice: "——Tch. She's coming, I suppose!"

Immediately after Beatrice's voice of a alarm, a great plume of smoke rose before Subaru, Beatrice and Meili's eyes.

An accompanying shockwave came from the giant silhouette that had leaped down from the balcony without any hesitation, rather than running straight down the Tower.

He could hear the heavy grating sound of its large pincers coming from the thick of the smoke. The giant scorpion slowly emerged from within, pointed directly at Subaru instead of the countless enemies around them.

Subaru: "Beako, Meili! We need to buy some time! Emilia-tan's victory is our victory condition!"

Beatrice: "I get you loud and clear, in fact!"

Meili: "And exactly how long is she going to take to achieve thaaat?"

Subaru: "As fast as Emilia-tan possibly can."

Emilia was always earnest, and extremely hardworking.

Thus, there was no way she would compromise or slack off with the problems they were facing. The results she delivered were always the best she could give, and with it came the highest firepower she could muster.

Subaru believed in that, he loved that, he cherished that. That was why he was going to be able to stand his ground here.

Subaru: "Now then, let's do this, we're going to break fate—— no, we're going to break the Tower's system!"

△▼△▼△▼△

???: “I see, so that’s why you’re——”

???: “Yeah! That’s right! Subaru told me that I’d definitely find a way to rewrite the situation we’re in if I go up to the very top of the Tower!”

Emilia focused on running as fast as she could, giving her only a brisk reply. She was holding Echidna in her arms as she ran, with the latter trying to make her body as small as possible.

At first Emilia had taken her by the hand as they ran, but being slowed down by her, she had ended up picking her up partway through, and she had remained like that ever since.

In fact, it was much faster this way, and it strained her body far less, so it was a huge help. Even so…

“Anastasia”: “Should it not be you who needs to save their strength? You have no clue whatsoever on what is lying in wait for you, right?”

Emilia: “Huh? Oh, you do not need to worry! Anastasia-san’s body is reaaally light, and it’s not like it’s gotten any heavier even with you in it. It’s no sweat off my back!”

“Anastasia”: “My presence does not really have anything to do with Ana’s weight… Like, not at all.”

Faced with those slightly amiss answers, Echidna looked at Emilia—— rather, at the beauty of the unfamiliar half-elf as she felt the struggles within herself.

This unfamiliar half-elf was one of her companions who’d had her very Name stolen away by the Authority of Gluttony. Her circumstances were supposed to be pretty much like Julius’s, but the way she was behaving was far different compared to him. Were their intrinsic personalities different? Or was it perhaps a difference in the people who were there to support them?

“Anastasia”: “Does it not terrify you that you have been forgotten?”

Emilia: “It’s reaaally scary, and lonely. But I don’t have the time to sit down and curl up in fear. Don’t you think?”

Emilia gave a brutally honest reply to that hushed question. The strength behind her change seemed like a testament of her mental fortitude, or perhaps it was down to some other factor.

Emilia had said before—— *I'm not worried because Subaru remembers me*.

Those had been awfully simple words out of a dream, yet, at the same time, they seemed to be the truth.

"Anastasia": "————"

It was not clear what made Natsuki Subaru impervious to the effects of the Authority of Gluttony. Though strictly speaking it was not like even he was completely impervious to it. In fact, had he not said that the reason he had lost his Memories had been due to an unexpected encounter with Gluttony?

So Echidna could not say with certainty that Subaru's specialness was the main cause behind everything that occurred. Meaning, there supposedly still existed a definite possibility.

A possibility of, couldn't they have protected their Names and Memories somehow?

If they could have done that, then Anastasia and Julius both——

"Anastasia": "————"

When she stopped to think about how Julius felt, having been forgotten by everyone, could anyone even blame him for faltering? Though, having witnessed Emilia's strength after she had been placed in the same situation, she could not help but wonder what was different between the two.

The difference certainly laid in who was at their side. The difference certainly laid in who was beside them, supporting them.

Likewise, would it have been possible to keep Julius from crumbling if only he'd had some support? And, shouldn't someone have been there for him, like Natsuki Subaru had been for Emilia?

"Anastasia": "What should…"

I do, Echidna was unable find an answer to that question within herself.

It was so bad that she felt like this may have been the first time in her life as an empty Artificial Spirit in which she had been at such a loss with herself.

Emilia: “Echidna?”

“Anastasia”: “…It’s nothing. More importantly, is it true? That you managed to find a way through Reid Astrea’s violence… and passed the Second Floor’s Examination before?”

Emilia: “Mhm, it is. It’s reaaally hard to explain now that you’ve forgotten.”

Emilia gave her an adorable puff of her cheeks. But, the fact of the matter was, she was embarrassed by how she had beaten the Examination of that man, who was the very picture of “violence” itself.

Echidna never for one moment imagined that she would be lying in this situation, and despite only knowing her for a short time, Echidna could tell that her nature was one not suited to telling fibs. So everything was surely true. It had only been for a few moments, but judging by how she had stood up against the giant scorpion on the balcony, there was no doubt that she was quite the capable fighter.

So, the only remaining issue was——

“Anastasia”: “So, you can find a way to fix this situation if you go up to the very top of the Tower. What is the basis for that?”

Emilia: “Subaru told me he heard what the fifth rule was from Shaula. Plus, Subaru’s thought long and hard about this before coming up with the idea, so I’m pretty sure it’s the right way to go about things.”

“Anastasia”: “To me that seems like an idea based on excessive blind faith, but…”

Emilia: “If you’re still full of doubts, we can address them, but I don’t think now’s the time for it… That, and, Echidna, didn’t you come here with me because you believe in Subaru as well?”

As Emilia turned her crystal-clear eyes over to her, Echidna was left at a loss for words. Seeing Echidna’s reaction, Emilia gave her a smile that was tinged with delight, even if it seemed a tad out of place.

Emilia: “You see, my Knight is reaaally giving it his all for us.”

Emilia showed with her attitude that she was proud of the fact that their hard work was being appreciated. In response to that, Echidna likewise felt an odd pang of emotion. She placed her palm over Anastasia's flat chest and breathed out a sigh.

"Anastasia": "————"

These sorts of emotions are dangerous, she warned herself.

They were completely irrational and out of place. At the very least, they were not something she ought to feel at a time like this. She needed to forget them if possible, and if not, then at the very least she should forget them for the time being.

Emilia: "——Subaru's relying on me!"

Echidna felt, amongst other things, envious of her. She, who believed so, so much in her companion, who was that much closer to her.

I need to forget this present moment and focus on overcoming the situation we are in, she thought to herself.

"Anastasia": "————"

Emilia's long legs moved gracefully as she flew up the stairs. Then, after they had climbed up what should have been quite a lot of steps, a tremendous flash of silver came into view, scattering sparks everywhere.

With their vision now unobstructed, they saw a battle unfolding wherever they looked. With his lilac hair aflutter, and white uniform stained with blood, stood Julius Juukulius.

And, the person he was up against was——

Julius: "Guh, kuh——!"

???: "Whoawhoawhoawhoawhoa! Doesn't look like ya can do anythin' 'bout me like that, ya prick. Don't'cha go underestimatin' me, ya prick. Ya prick, did'cha come here to mess about? Ya prick, if ya wanna mess about then go put on some makeup. When ya do, I'm gonna step on ya, bully ya and ruffle ya 'bout, ya damn prick."

The very embodiment of violence, Reid Astrea, let loose a nightmarish slash with the pair of chopsticks he held in his hands as he hurled abusive words, practised a *danse macabre*, with the Second Floor as his stage.

Theirs was a battle that transcended what humanity could fathom, even so, the fact that Julius was far inferior in strength to him was something that was so sadly obvious, that it could be grasped instantly even by the untrained eye.

Julius: "——Tch."

Dealing with the flurry of slashes and kicks coming from Reid, Julius countered by spinning his Knight's sword around and thrusting it into one of the gaps.

His sharp thrust derived from extraordinary technique seemed to be nothing more than a blur of light, yet Reid easily avoided it with a yawn, and that was with his eyepatch blocking part of his sight.

Reid: "RRRRHAAA!!"

Looking on, stunned that Reid had avoided his thrust, Julius had a seemingly casual overhead kick slammed into his torso, with the soles of Reid's *zori*[279] digging straight into his abdominal muscles. Letting out a pained cry, Julius took a few steps back.

Then, a blow from one of his chopsticks dropped down towards his head——

Reid: "Get pulverised, ya prick."

With a vertical flash, his slash, accompanied by a shockwave, cut through air, space and reason itself.

His sword slash was so overwhelming that ways to even express it no longer came to their minds. It was so beautiful, that even though his weapon had been a chopstick, one could not help but be captivated by it, even if they were an amateur at swordplay—— It was the pinnacle of swordplay, the very culmination of it, that which was what was being manifested there.

Julius: "————"

[279] Traditional sandals from Japan, similar to flip-flops. For more information, see here.

A slash so beautiful, that one would probably die from just admiring it.

Julius leapt aside, dodging it, but the hem of his cloak did not make it in time and was swallowed by Reid's blade, evaporating. A vertical groove was left carved into the Second Floor of the Watchtower, which was made of unknown materials, as if it were all a jape.

And to make matters worse——

Reid: "Oioi, ain't'cha bein' naive thinkin' ya've escaped with that?"

Julius: "——Hk."

Giving him a mocking smile, the air he had cleaved through warped and bent, with a gust of wind starting to roar.

That moment, Julius, who had supposedly managed to jump aside, gulped, and had his legs dragged as if they were being pulled back towards the torn space—— back into the range of Reid's sword slashes.

To their disbelief, this was due to a sort of gravitational pull from the torn space restoring itself. It was pulling Julius back after his narrow brush with death, straight into the range of the next blow.

Reid's punch was thrown towards Julius, unable to move due to what was happening——

Emilia: "——That's enough."

A split second before he released his punch, the sound of a chiming silver bell interjected between the two swordsmen.

However, in contrast to the beautiful chime of her voice, the way she had joined the fight was rather audacious. Echidna became lost for words, faced with that extreme spectacle in front of her.

Reid: "Ahhn?"

Julius: "————"

Then, unable to conceal the suspicion in his voice, Reid looked up above him. Julius on the other hand opened his eyes wide in surprise, utterly speechless.

They were looking at the strange thing that had appeared above them—— a block of ice so mighty it covered the ceiling.

This block of destruction, able to shatter even a dragon carriage into smithereens in one fell swoop, fell towards the two swordsmen.

Reid and Julius's instant reactions were contrastingly different. Julius leapt away to avoid the airborne block of frost, while Reid curved his lips up into a smile and laughed. And——

Reid: "Hah!!"

With a fierce smile on his face, Reid thrust up one of his chopsticks at the falling block of ice. His raised chopstick collided with the lowest point of the falling mass of ice. By some miracle, the forces between the two points stood at an equilibrium with each other, causing Reid's chopstick to bend albeit it still prevented the descent of the ice.

Reid stamped his *zori* down firmly onto the floor, the force of that action travelling through his chopstick, flowing into the ice block still being held up by said chopstick. A crack began to run up the block as his chopstick snapped in half.

Reid: "…Now wasn't that somethin'."

Reid spat those words out, and a split second later, the block of ice with a crack running through its center shattered in the blink of an eye.

Chunks of ice began raining down, and while basking in them, Reid slowly turned himself around. Receiving the piercing gaze from his blue, uncovered eye, Emilia pointed her palm at him, with a look of resolve setting in on her face.

Their gazes crossed each other's, causing Reid to ogle at her in surprise,

Reid: "Ya're a real feisty one ain't'cha, oi. It ain't like I dislike women like ya, but… AHH!? What the hell, ya twat, ya real damn smokin', ain't'cha!? Ya smokin' hottie! Why the hell's there such a smokin' hottie chick in the middle of this sand sea! C'mon, ya're gonna be my opponent, ya twat."

Emilia: "My apologies, I didn't mean to interrupt, but I do need to get Julius to beat you…"

Reid: “Wha?”

Emilia paid no heed to Reid’s egoistic talk, and instead continued with a troubled look appearing on her face. Reid frowned at what she had said, but Julius was the one who was far more bewildered, having just been rescued.

Though he had managed to escape from the block of ice that Emilia had unleashed, he could not hide his suspicion towards the fact that she had made a sudden appearance. Keeping himself at a distance from Reid, he turned his yellow eyes to look over at Echidna, who was standing beside her, and spoke,

Julius: “I get that she helped me, but… Who in the world is she, Echidna?”

“Anastasia”: “It is somewhat difficult for me to explain her identity. But, if I may put it simply, she is someone in the same shoes as you Julius.”

Julius: “What the…?”

Speaking those words, Julius stared at Emilia once again, his eyes widening slightly, probably because her features coincided with a being he knew about.

Julius: “An elf, with silver hair and eyes of amethyst… No, I find it hard to believe that such a distinctive being would have suddenly turned up in the Tower. Then, could it be that she is…”

In light of the situation in the Tower, as well as the peculiarities of her appearance, and the fact that her presence was nowhere to be found within him, Julius spontaneously felt a sense of incongruity within him.

Julius had come to the answer by himself. Seeing his startled eyes, Emilia gave him a firm nod,

Emilia: “Julius, right now I know exactly how you feel.”

Julius: “Then, you are as well…”

Given that they’d both had their Names snatched away by Gluttony, Julius immediately grasped their circumstances. And as soon as he did, his conviction that Emilia was their ally appeared to grow.

He stood in front of both Echidna and Emilia, protecting them, once again pointing his sword at Reid,

Julius: “You have my thanks for helping me out earlier. But I still do not quite get why you two have come rushing here considering what is occurring in the Tower. What is happening with the Library of Taygeta, and with Miss Rem and the situation outside?”

“Anastasia”: “There is an attempt underway to try and bring all these matters together so to deal with them all at once. The idea is Natsuki-kun’s, and the ones helping him with it are all of us in the Tower.”

Julius: “Subaru’s? But he is——”

A puzzled frown appeared on Julius’s face as he heard Subaru’s name wedged in the middle of her explanation.

As far as he knew, Subaru should have faced Reid’s Book of the Dead in the Library of Taygeta, and his consciousness was supposedly in a state of disarray for having made his return. Beatrice had told him that his return had been difficult, thus, Julius had continued to fight against Reid so that they could overcome the turmoil in the Tower in their own way.

Therefore, even if she were saying Subaru had woken up, and had concocted this idea, it was possible to say it was only natural that there was no real link between spontaneity and recognition. Nevertheless——

Reid: “I haven’t got anythin’ against y’all gettin’ all chummy with each other, but don’t’cha pricks go jabberin’ away while ignorin’ me!”

The floor exploded with a loud bang, resulting in Julius receiving a blow from the intruding Reid’s chopstick. Although he had lost one chopstick, he still had another one left. And it was not like he had to use them. Even if he were to fight just empty-handed, it was not as if his strength would diminish.

Julius: “Kuh!”

While buffeted by Reid’s sharp attacks, Julius rallied himself and focused on keeping his desperate defense up. Seeing that, Reid unleashed a blow with one of his hands able to fell even a Dragon[280],

[280] A bit of clarification here on why this is capitalized: the word “dragon”, in Re: Zero, is written in Japanese in two ways. For the first, the character “竜” is used to signify “dragon”, which is what is used for ground dragons (地竜), water dragons (水竜) and flying dragons (飛竜). For the second, the character “龍” is used, and this is employed for dragons taken as more powerful, such as Blight Dragon Valgren (mentioned in Arc 5), and the Divine Dragon Volcanica. For that reason, the distinction is made via capitalization of the word “Dragon”.

literally. Simultaneously, he stuck out his spare hand at Emilia as she searched for an opening, thrusting his fingers out at her.

Reid: “I ain’t got a clue what ya’re tryin’ to pull off, but I don’t think I’m gonna let you do as ya please, ya twat. I’m gonna be your opponent after I’m done dealin’ with this novice… Huh?”

Reid abruptly tilted his head in doubt mid-sentence.

His head still inclined, he then brought his fingers of his spare hand to his eyepatch atop his left eye, spitting out a venomous tirade prefaced with “Oi oi oi oi”,

Reid: “The fuck, ya twat. For some reason my hand ain’t movin’ to stop ya. Unless I’ve like, suddenly become smitten by ya… No way, ya must’ve passed the Examination!”

Emilia: “Yeah, I did! You lost because you touched my chest with your chopsticks!”

Reid: “Kah! Now that’s one way of losin’ that I can really get behind! What a huge waste that I can’t even remember it, smokin’ hottie!”

Reid clucked his tongue, his words indicating that there was some shackle on him that would not allow him to stop Emilia. That meant that the obstruction standing in between her and her duty was now gone. In other words——

Emilia: “Julius, I…”

Julius: “You may go my lovely lady, you, who like me, are of unknown name.”

Turning only his head around, Julius interrupted Emilia as she was about to say something. Seeing his Knight’s sword now held at the ready again, Emilia kept her silence at his words.

Seeing the surprise on her face, Julius gave her a gallant smile,

Julius: “You have your duty to carry out. I know it is something I shall not be able to help you with, but that is fine with me—— I pray everything goes well.”

Emilia: “——Yeah, for you too!”

Receiving Julius's encouragement, Emilia nodded at him and then broke out into a run. Reid did not make any attempt at stopping her. Letting her pass by him, the one-eyed red lion witnessed her take her leave.

Then, as Emilia reached the front of the staircase in the innermost part of the Second Floor that would lead the way up, she stopped in her tracks and turned around,

Emilia: "It's Emilia."

Julius: "————"

Emilia: "My name is Emilia, just Emilia—— Let us meet again later!"

Leaving her name behind, Emilia ran up the stairs with an air of elegance about her. Echidna let out a long, long sigh as she watched her disappear from sight.

From here on out, Emilia's duty was to head to the top. So, Echidna's duty was to——

Julius: "You are not going anywhere? Are you planning on watching me fight?"

"Anastasia": "Only if you will permit me do so… Well, no, I suppose not. I am the one who has decided to do that."

Julius: "————"

Glancing towards Echidna, who was standing by the wall, Julius then pursed his lips together. She took a quick gasp of air as she witnessed all kinds of emotions flitting across the profile of his face.

"Anastasia": "It is not like I can do anything, but if Ana were here, she would have probably done this. No matter where I am in this Tower, I will always be subject to danger. Given that, I shall stand behind you out of my own volition. Because…"

Julius: "————"

"Anastasia": "——Because you are Anastasia Hoshin's Knight. Isn't that right?"

It took a tremendous amount of courage to believe in something that did not feel real.

It was nigh-impossible to grasp just how much strength it took to believe in something that had no concrete basis, to the point that it would make her feel relieved, at least when compared to believing in something that was actually tangible.

Regardless, Echidna spoke those words to the man before her eyes, his back facing away from her, while believing in that uncertainty.

Julius: "————"

Receiving that, Julius lowered his eyes framed by long eyelashes. And with that, he let out a mute sigh, both deep and long, and——

Julius: "You are able to give me more strength than you give yourself credit for. Merely from the fact that someone went and summoned their courage to believe, and hold expectations, in a me who may not be anyone anymore."

"Anastasia": "Julius…"

For Julius, the footing he had lost had become uncertain.

For Echidna, the bonds which she was supposed to know had become ambiguous.

The two of them had to rely on something so shaky to build this relationship which altogether differed to the one that they should have been bound by. Nevertheless, at this very moment, the two of them must have surely been seeing the same thing.

So for that reason——

"Anastasia": "——Julius, I have a message for you."

Julius: "A message?"

"Anastasia": "Yeah. Everyone is fighting all over the Tower, so—— He said, «Hurry your ass and settle things here, then come help the others»."

Julius: "————"

Echidna could tell that this was his kind of encouragement, thus she conveyed it to him exactly as she had heard. Julius's slender shoulders tensed slightly after he heard it.

And Julius digested the contents of the message, interiorizing it. His response following it was clear, and dramatic.

Julius: "Haa."

It almost seemed like he had let out a short, sharp gasp of air. But, it was not like that at all.

He had let out a laugh. He had breathed out a single gasp of air from the pit of his stomach to wheeze out that laugh. Had there been anyone here who knew Julius, this would have been something for them to marvel at.

——Julius Juukulius, was facing battle with a smile on his face.

Julius: "——If he has broken out of his shell, then I must not lose here either."

His expression of determination was quiet, yet full of hidden zeal.

Julius held his Knight's sword aloft in front of him and faced his foe, his own self reflected in his blade. Reid had been lodging a bored look on his face for a while—— but now, he was grinning like a shark.

Reid: "Ya really kicked into gear, didn't'cha, ya prick."

Julius: "Pardon me, but when it comes to fighting, I always take it seriously."

Reid: "Nono, that ain't what I mean. Ya get it right? Even if I don't spell it out for ya, ya prick."

With a grin still plastered on his face, Reid lifted his left hand. He flipped his eyepatch up, uncovered his eye. Thus, with his perfectly functioning blue eyes, the zenith of all swordsmen pointed his cheerful murderous intent towards his challenger.

His fighting spirit was so formidable, that anyone faint of heart would have been killed by the glint in his eyes alone. However, Julius met that sharp glint of his head-on, and Echidna behind him likewise braced herself and endured it.

Seeing the two of them endure the raging storm of his fighting spirit, Reid loudly clacked his fangs together,

Reid: “Stick Swinger Reid. Remember only my name, before you disappear.”

Julius: “————”

Exchanging one’s name in battle before crossing swords was a sign of recognizing a warrior as their equal. There was no knowing how much Reid really cared about that norm, but regardless of what he thought, the considerations of the person who had been basked in that had changed dramatically.

Taking a breath, calming himself, Julius stilled his raging heart, and

Julius: “I shall give you my name once again. I am Julius Juukulius. One and only Knight to Anastasia Hoshin-sama, Royal Candidate of the Kingdom of Lugunica—— It is high time I give up acting the part of a nameless Knight.”

Spontaneously, so that it would be engraved in both his self, and the world itself, he magnificently proclaimed his Name.

△▼△▼△▼△

Leaving behind Julius and Echidna downstairs, Emilia resumed her running path up the steps.

Her long legs were moving as fast as she could muster, skipping up the stairs two or three steps at a time. Though the speed she was going at was inordinate, her own thoughts were screaming at her to go faster and faster.

Emilia: “——Guh.”

Gritting her back teeth, a look of desperation was adorning Emilia’s beautiful face in profile.

She was worried about the two she had left behind downstairs on the Second Floor. Reid was extremely strong, foulmouthed and a thug to boot. The two of them could easily get hurt, both physically and mentally, by dealing with him.

Naturally Emilia's worries did not just stop at Julius and Echidna. Would Subaru, Beatrice and Meili manage to keep Shaula in check? Would Ram be able to play her part too? Would Patrasche keep guard over Rem? Her anxieties, such as whether she would be forced to rebuild all her relationships from scratch having had her Name eaten, were never-ending. She felt like she was going to burst into tears, were she to take a moment to stop.

However, she did not stop. Neither did she shed any tears. She endured the tingling sensation at the back of her throat.

Emilia: "After all, nothing is over yet…!"

The fact that they believed in her, and that they were able to believe in her, was what was propping Emilia's entirety up right now.

She was full of worries, brimming with anxiety, but she was also full of "I believe in you's", which trumped over those emotions.

Emilia: "——Hk! Light!"

As she continued to pour her heart and soul in running up the stairs, Emilia's amethyst eyes caught a glimpse of a white glow at the far end of her field of view. She realized that it was coming from the end of this extremely long staircase, and that it would lead to the unknown First Floor.

The moment she comprehended that, she firmly kicked off from the floor and sped up even further. Then, finally——

Emilia: "——I made it out!"

Breaking through into the light, the staircase came to an end before Emilia. What unfurled itself before her eyes that instant, was not an area that one could call a floor.

Emilia: "Huh…?"

Emilia stopped in her tracks, completely flabbergasted, and unintentionally let out her surprise at the scene she was faced with. Reflected in her amethyst eyes, was not the next part of the familiar Watchtower she had come to expect.

The walls had disappeared, as had the ceiling, spread out all around her lay the vibrant blue sky—— Emilia was not standing inside the building, but rather, she was outside. After running up the Second Floor's stairs, she had ended up emerging right on the rooftop at the top of the Tower.

Emilia: "The First Floor, is it outside…? This place is even higher than the clouds…"

There was a vast, circular floor at the summit of the Tower, bereft of any other partitions or anything that looked like a handrail at its edge. Therefore, she could easily look down below by going over to the edge of the floor.

Clouds which were supposedly far above in the heavens were brushing against the Tower. Emilia's breath caught as she realized she had come all the way up to the clouds, or possibly even above them.

It was the first time Emilia had ever come to a place as high as this. However, despite receiving such a shock, she was quickly distracted by another profound emotion.

???: "————"

——There was a presence there, that she had not been able to notice on account of how still and grand it kept itself.

Emilia: "——Ah."

Emilia had been busy looking at stuff like where she was, the height of the clouds and what the situation was like on the First Floor. She had belatedly realized the being that had swept past the corner of her eyes; then, slowly turning around, she let out a massive gasp.

Even though Emilia had almost fallen into despair from being forgotten by the world, being robbed of her Name, her heart had still stood firm in the end—— But even that Emilia was lost for words in sheer awe.

The "being" that had appeared before her eyes was beyond the pale of her imagination, to that much of an extreme. Because that being was——

Emilia: "You're…"

???: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

Its voice was solemn, and it felt like it was being roared directly into her soul, Emilia became aware of the trembling of her own voice.

Was there anyone who could fault Emilia, and call her weak-minded? No one would be able to. It would be impossible. Because all living creatures had no choice but to prostrate themselves before this being.

Because the name of this being was——

???: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

With his huge body covered in glittering azure scales, the Divine Dragon Volcanica, looking down upon Emilia, while exerting a presence that seemed like it would blow even her very soul out of existence, so declared.

△▼△▼△▼△

Outside of the Tower, commenced the battle of Shaula, who had transformed into the titanic scorpion, against Subaru and the rest.

In the Second Floor of the Tower, the swordplay of the grinning wielder of violence, Reid Astrea, and Julius reopened.

On the First Floor of the Tower, Emilia achieved an unforeseen encounter with the mighty existence awaiting there.

And, on the spiral staircase connecting the Fourth Floor and Sixth Floor of the Tower——

???: "Ahhh, damn it! Even after stealing it and everything, it just feels like not having put it to decent use, doesn't it, geeez us!"

『――我、ボルカニカ。古の盟約により、頂へ至る者の志を問わん』
『――汝、塔の頂へ至りし者。一層を踏む、全能の請願者』
「」
そのエミリアの眼差しを一身に浴びながら、ボルカニカはゆっくりと瞬きした。

Spitting away in irritation, the young boy clicked his tongue whilst tearing at his dark-brown hair. Upon swinging down the hand scratching his head, what had been generated therein was a beautiful, ornate sword shaped with ice.

With the stolen Name as the foundation, it was a special power which he had reconstructed, but contrary to its appearance, its regulation of Mana was exquisitely arduous, and was quite difficult to use jointly with other Memories. In the first place, combining the skills of multiple others required a suitable sense, and that was something which Roy and Louis were maladroit at.

???: “Weeell, it’s because we excel in it that we are so able, but you knooow.”

Even within the trio of siblings possessing the Authority of Gluttony, each one’s way of utilized the Authority differed subtly. Amongst them, as one who took pride in being Gourmet, the points he would like to object to in his younger brother and sister’s ways were not few—— Fortes connected to sense of superiority. Though something like advice, was unbefitting of him.

???: “The message won’t get across to dear cute Louis, or that chap Roy… Ahhh, it can’t be helped! If the two of them are saying they can’t do anything then it can’t be helped! That means that we can thoroughly lick the feasts present inside this Tower down to the roots! How nice, so nice, quite nice, very nice, as it’s nice, it certainly is nice, surely it is nice, surely it must be nice, as it must be nice! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!”

Crunching the sword of frost in his hand, with his sharp fangs unraveled, Gluttony—— Ley Batenkaitos decided to itemize all of the targets inside the Tower for his own platter, without leaving a single one.

Fortunately, the situation had been served. What remained was to simply select the order, and what was to be the main course——

???: “——Do you think you have the privilege to be choosing that? How very leisurely of you.”

Ley: “————”

Upon the voice descending from the top of the spiral staircase, Ley seized chewing the ice, and raised his head. Overhead, on the Fourth Floor were light-crimson eyes looking at Ley, who was standing on the staircase between the Fourth Floor and the Fifth Floor.

With the same hue as blood or blaze, eyes with terribly icy heat, were looking down upon Ley's ferocious hunger as if pitying. And——

Ram: "From what was said, it seems you were the one who tore apart Ram and Rem's sisterly love, isn't it—— Kindly die whilst baying like a pig."

Arc 6 Chapter 80 - Death of the Mind

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 5 “Mental Death”, Parts 1-2

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——It was the scent of rage.

Fragrant, rich, it was the scent of highly pure rage. Prodigiously churning this slender, petite body, he understood that it would uplift it to greater heights.

Ley: “Hahaa!”

Facing each other from the upper and lower ends of the spiral staircase, Batenkaitos laughed with sadness and gloom upon Ram’s caustic remark.

Breathing in the resentment and hatred she, the young girl with potent emotions conceived in her light-crimson eyes, directed towards him, Batenkaitos tasted ecstasy.

Should he state without giving much thought to selecting the wording, saying that this one breath was what he was living for would not be an exaggeration.

Ley: “How nice, so nice, quite nice, very nice, as it’s nice, isn’t it nice. As there normally aren’t any people who’d face us with such an enraged expression, you seeee. It sure is a really valuable feeling, isn’t iiit. Do you understand? We wonder if you do understaaand, the delight which we’re feeling right now!”

Stepping on the ground upon expressing the vivifying emotion, Batenkaitos licked his lips.

Indeed, this emotion and encounter, was something Batenkaitos normally could not ever hope for.

The Memories and Names stolen through the Authority of Gluttony got disengaged from the world, and with the exception of Roy and Louis, it became impossible for anyone to even be cognizant of them.

The grief of having lost someone precious, the rage of being dispossessed, the hollow sense of loss, anything and everything had gotten evanesced entirely, beyond all help.

Ley: “So naturally, that’s a matter-of-course. That’s why, we’ve never minded it, you seeee.”

Whenever he operated as a member of the much-loathed Witch Cult, on copious occasions would he meet humans who directed their hatred towards his affiliation. However, never had there been one who knew of Ley Batenkaitos’s deeds, who harbored hatred for Ley Batenkaitos individually, who aimed to kill Ley Batenkaitos specifically.

That natural divine providence brought forth by the Authority of Gluttony, that obvious unwritten law, had been overruled.

——With the emergence of an outsider, who did not sustain the effects of the Authority of Gluttony.

Ley: “Natsuki Subaru…!”

Whispering the name of the man Louis had been attached to, Batenkaitos attained a sweet ache in the depths of his slim chest. It was not as if he had taken influence by Louis. He had known about him, even prior to that.

He had been thinking of him, powerfully, profoundly, far earlier than even Louis. That being——

Ley: “——Nee-sama, will also understand, riiight?”

The connection between the origin of this sweet ache in his chest, and the young girl looking down towards him was deep—— No, not merely deep. Two hearts that beat as one, irreplaceable individuals, saying that they were the other halves of each other would be unobjectionable as well.

Thus, she would surely understand. These sweet, fleeting, far-too-mighty emotions. This sensation, blended with both love and hate, and the ache within the chest longing for release.

That was why, he addressed with half of his mouth open, pouring in that conviction and expectation——

Ram: “Ram has already told you—— To kindly die whilst baying like a pig.”

Ley: “——~hk!”

The subsequent instant, Ram’s first move as she flew down after kicking the staircase, made Ley jump far backwards.

He had narrowly managed to draw his body back, but the fine point of the wand being pointed out had been accurately aiming for his right eye. Should he be slow in pulling back his head, it would have ransacked his brain through his eyeball.

Ley: “Geez, nee-sama is mercileeess! Had we eaten this one just now, forget about imitating the bay of a pig, we would’ve died unable to do anything!”

Ram: “Ram has reconsidered. If you were made to imitate something below the standard of a pig, then it’ll surely be a real affront for the pig as well.”

Flying through the spiral staircase, his landing was delayed solely due to the difference in the levels of stairs. Whilst apprising her chilling intent to kill, Ram’s furious assault waged a pursuit of fierce vigor towards Batenkaitos.

Whilst gyrating her slim figure, Ram pointed out her wand, fired a kick, drilled in a shot of the elbow. Batenkaitos dodged them entirely through the handling of his body, but things like the hit which had grazed past his ear certainly possessed the vigor that upon a single hit, would certainly lead to loss of faculty of that part of the body.

Ley: “Haha! Scary scary! It’s scary though you knooow!”

Batenkaitos laughed whilst using his body to evade the unhesitating strikes in pursuit of him. That was not flexibility, but exaltation—— No, slight flexibility as well.

Ram’s martial arts were quite something. Lacking all forgiveness, she possessed no faltering in her aim to kill. Yet, Batenkaitos dodged with leisure and ease. The reason for that was quite simple.

Ley: “We already proooperly know, that nee-sama is more amazing, you see~.”

The multitude of Memories terminated and packed together within Batenkaitos. Within them was a passionate one which adored Ram as an elder sister, which yearned for her infinite potential.

The untiring trust and expectation towards Ram which those Memories were endowed with, conveyed their contrast with the Ram before his eyes, nearly to a sorrowful extent, to Batenkaitos. To summarize——

Ley: "——Nee-sama without her horn, is nothing but a counterfeit which even Rem can substitute for, isn't that riiight."

Ram: "————"

Ley: "Ah, did you get angry? Have you gotten angry? If you want to get angry then you can get angry perfectly fine, nee-sama. Now that we think of it, we've never even had a proper sisterly quarrel before, you knooow."

Batenkaitos set forth the reminiscences as if a belonging of his own. Though Ram's cheeks stiffened in reaction to his speech and conduct, her attacks did not slacken.

Batenkaitos admiringly thought within his innermost heart, that she was really quite pushing herself.

It was famously known that Onis who lost their horns lost their bodily control, though it was unclear how much anguish it entailed. Ram had also been continually tormented due to that penalty.

It was unknown just how many times the thought of wanting to take over her pain had come to mind.

However, alongside that also came another thought—— That oneself would not be able to endure the anguish she bore.

If the agony of losing the horn depended on the strength that Oni originally possessed, then Ram had certainly possessed the greatest in that regard, which no other Oni in the world could share.

Thus, commendations were due to her onrushing form by way of her own determination, through that compelling anguish. And, gratitude was due to her earnest wolfing stance, with an unruffled facial expression.

With the ripening of the greatest, supreme, premier flavor, to simply whom should he express his delight for being witness to the moment the rich aroma arose, he did not know.

——He hailed gratitude and admiration, toward the miracle of happening across this gourmet delicacy.

Ley: "Truly! Nee-sama is so wonderful!!"

A murderous dance blended with love and hate unfolded on the spiral staircase. Whilst tasting that to his heart's content, Batenkaitos blessed Ram's existence.

And, tilting his body, turning over, stooping down, dodging as per the Memories craved,

Ley: "Now with a tadaaa~, counterattack *jiko*——[281]"

Ram: "How truly noisy."

Surrounding Ram whilst she pointed out her wand, Batenkaitos aimed for her fair neck. His side which had gotten into her undisputable blind spot, and Ram's line of sight entangled when she turned around.

At that single moment, feeling intimidated, Batenkaitos interrupted the strike and flew in evasion and escaped. However, the instant after the wind grazed past his right cheek, he felt blood starting to drip.

Ley: "——Hk."

Tracing his cut cheek with his hand, Batenkaitos inhaled faintly.

It was a wound he was not supposed to sustain. At the very least, the Memories present within Batenkaitos—— if he were to abide by the existence who best knew the prodigy Ram, then a future in which he ought to have sustained this wound did not exist. Yet——

Ram: "Though Ram told you to bay disgracefully, an unsightly opponent's voice is also rough to hear. Ram does not intend to keep you company any longer, so you will be getting killed."

Ley: "Nee-sama, this is…"

[281] Partial Engrish flip. Ley starts uttering the word "time" (タイム) in Engrish before being interrupted. So here, it was replaced with a partial spelling of the word "時刻" (time/moment), fully read as "toki".

Ram: “If you had been evaluating Ram relying on the Memories, then your evaluation is yet too naive.”

Looking at Batenkaitos after he stained his cheek with blood by his hand, Ram gently brushed her pink hair. With her dreadfully cold sidelong glance towards this side,

Ram: “Were you intending to bring out Ram’s true colors? If that’s the case, then that is quite laughable—— Ram’s potential is infinite. After all…”

Ley: “————”

Ram: “——Ram is, Rem’s nee-sama.”

A baseless, careless remark, the reason why it echoed with such extraordinary persuasion was because that was how the Memories, present within nobody but Batenkaitos, had captured the existence of their elder sister.

Recognizing that reality, Batenkaitos erased his smile and distorted his cheeks in annoyance.

Boring. Uninteresting. She did not get it.

Ley: “Both rage and hatred, are spices for enhancing flavors. But, if the taste of the spices is too strong, if it asserts itself too powerfully, then even that platter goes to waste. Guess nee-sama, who doesn’t cook, would be completely clueless about these customs, huuuh?”

Ram: “That’s not true. There’s nothing to hide, Ram’s special dish is steamed potatoes after all.”

The Memories which had vivid recollection of that resuscitated, and his stomach growled.

Intentionally ignoring that call of the sense of emptiness and hunger in his stomach, Batenkaitos casted his mood to play around aside.

Ram was still yet to demonstrate the true worth of her strength. In other words, that meant naught but that she had not revealed everything, even to the younger sister who was physically quite similar to her. In other words——

Ley: “——Nee-sama, won’t trust even her little sister, talk about the ultimate individualism, isn’t iiit.”

Ram: "…What a superficial way of understanding things. Ram does not know how many human lives you have tasted, but even those people do not come to mind. Everything aside from Rem is trifle."

Repudiating Batenkaitos's outlook on meals, Ram straitened her light-crimson eyes.

And, whilst caressing her own slim chest,

Ram: "Kindly exert yourself as much as you can, Barusu."

Calling out to the young boy not present here, extraordinary determination levitated across her cold expression.

Ram: "Though having something like a shared destiny between us, makes Ram shiver."

△▼△▼△▼△

He took a deep inhale, with a cloth covering his mouth protecting him from swallowing the sand.

If he were to be honest then he would have preferred to have goggles as well, but that would be a hope too high. Prepared to have grains of sand fly into his eyeballs, he had no choice but simply be careful about his eyes within the vortex of the sandy whirlwind.

Subaru: "Beako! Meili! We've got to pull through!"

Beatrice: "Betty knows, in fact!"

Meili: "Geez, you really don't know how to treat peopleee!"

The one traversing through his field of vision blurred by the sand, was a fiendish existence clad in a jet-black shell.

Approaching closer, and taking a single attack by its great pincers meant forfeiting one's life. Taking distance, and should it succeed in its efforts to fire its tail stinger meant forfeiting one's life. There were multiple other conditions of forfeiting one's life as well.

In terms of simply conditions of defeat, there existed more than plenty, that was what their situation was presently.

Subaru: “With that being said, that’s what always happens…!”

Natsuki Subaru’s battles were a continuous series of tightrope walks.

The reason why he suffocated despite knowing the future through Return by Death, was because the abilities he possessed were always so disproportionate to the sheer magnitude of the enemies he confronted.

Lacking cards to play was his omnipresent scenario. Whilst trusting everyone’s strength, expecting that they would adapt to the situations’ requirements and fight, Subaru himself struggled hard, a befitting answer to everyone’s expectations of him.

Subaru: “Rather than a fight of my own, this, is a fight of my wonderful comrades!”

Meili: “Is this really the situation to say thaaat!? Geez! Do your best, Hungry Horse King-chan!”

Receiving Subaru’s baloneous yell, Meili, who was racing right next to him, issued orders to the Witchbeasts—— the Hungry Horse Kings.

The Witchbeasts akin to centaurs screeched a cry like that of a child, and two of them carrying Subaru and Beatrice, and Meili respectively, rushed through the sea of sand.

And, the one in pursuit of their backs as they fiercely kicked the sand, was the titanic scorpion as it scratched the sand with its several legs, giving rise to a cloud of dust, resuming its hounding.

Shaula: “——Bishaaan!!”

Just as his instinct had told him earlier, should they distance themselves then the tail stinger, should they approach closer, then the enormous pincers would come for their lives. Whilst keeping a distance neither too close nor too far, they dealt with the enemy’s attacks.

Compared to the conditions of defeat he had listed, the sole condition for victory permitted to them was a change at the extremity of a battle to delay. It referred to Emilia capturing the First Floor of the Tower, and the rewriting of the cited rules.

As a matter of fact, he had not even confirmed whether that was an actual possibility——

Beatrice: “If that’s not possible, then it’d be strange to have that included in the Tower’s rules in the first place, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Exactly, Beako. Going out of their way and having «you can also destroy the rules» included in the rules means that the rules are premised on the fact that they’ll be destroyed.”

And if that was a possibility, then it perhaps would be a reward given to the one to capture the Tower. Should that be considered, then it was a right given only to the one who had cleared everything with proper means.

It was an immense relief that Emilia had truly broken through Reid. Had she not been victorious, then the means to save Shaula perhaps would not have even grazed past his hands.

Subaru: “Though I’ll never forgive him for sexually harassing Emilia-tan…!”

Though it was a happening infuriating to even look back on, Julius had been charged with retribution when it came to Reid.

Expecting that he would fully overwhelm that violent man, Subaru caught the enormous Watchtower within his field of vision and entrusted himself to the fierce struggle Beatrice and Meili were putting up.

Meili: “Onii-san! It isn’t easy to move around in this spot! I think it’ll be easier for the Witchbeast-chan’s to rampage about in a place further away from the Toweeer!?”

Subaru: “Guh…! I get what you’re saying! I get it but, no! I won’t get away from the Tower. If I get any further away, then I won’t understand!”

Rejecting Meili’s appeal, Subaru gnashed his molars whilst grabbing his chest. Cor Leonis’s effect resumed, and the locations of his comrades within the Tower were still within his sphere of grasp, in the form of fleeting lights. However, he did not know for what possible cause this Authority, with yet far too many uncertain facets, could come undone.

In terms of the Authority’s effects, what was the easiest to perceive was indeed distance.

In reality, Subaru did not know the locations of his comrades outside of the Augria Sand Dunes. If that was due to distance, then it was unknown how far he could get away from the Watchtower.

He was afraid of losing the ability to confirm the locations as well as the well-being of his comrades.

However, the greatest issue was not their well-being but losing the ability to shoulder their burden. It was a matter-of-course that Emilia or Julius had exposed their bodies to grave battles, but what further had an eagle grip on Subaru's heart was Ram, who was out for vengeance.

Subaru: "————"

Though he was confident that he had deployed his comrades to their respective utmost suitable positions, he had anticipated from the very beginning that even amongst them all, Ram's fight would become particularly dire. That was because her opponent was Ley Batenkaitos—— the originator of turning Rem into a Sleeping Beauty, and Ram's own condition.

Ram must be in perfect shape and form, otherwise she would not be able to oppose Ley Batenkaitos.

On top of that, he wished for Ram to beat Batenkaitos down to her heart's content. For that purpose, Subaru was required to shoulder the burden she consistently suffered. That was precisely why——

Subaru: "I can't just thoughtlessly get away from the Tower! Sorry for being a handicap, but please compromise!"

Meili: "Hk! This is, absolutely definitely going to come back to bite you lateeer!"

Rounding her lips upon Subaru's call, Meili shouted with a red face atop of the Hungry Horse King's back.

At the same pace, the young girl glared towards the sky and clapped her hands towards the existences circling around in the blue, cloudless sky.

Meili: "Feathered Mole-chans! It's showtiiime!"

Receiving the shrill command, the tiny shadows soaring in the sky swooped down towards the sand sea. Seeing they were aiming for the titanic scorpion atop the sand, Subaru instantly shouted "Beako!",

Subaru: "Match in with them!"

Beatrice: “——Hk, Betty knows, in fact! Vita!!”

Presuming Subaru’s aim, Beatrice put up her tiny palm towards the sky.

The chant’s effect was invoked, however, its aim had not been directed towards the titanic scorpion, but towards the Feathered Moles which had their eyes set on the titanic scorpion.

In the course of the descending Feathered Moles, there was a loop of pale light produced—— the moment the Feathered Moles passed through that loop, the small-sized Witchbeasts accelerated, clad in light.

Subaru: “————”

The piercing strike drilled into the outer shell of the titanic scorpion, giving rise to a violent note.

The titanic scorpion, which had been accepting the battle cries of the Feathered Moles like gentle breeze until now, stopped its multiple legs upon the direct hit possessing unignorable might.

Meili: “What was that, just now… Beatrice-chan, what did you do?”

Beatrice: “Made your Witchbeasts heavy right before they collided, I suppose. Their speed or solidity won’t change, but the result changes with a simple increase in weight, in fact.”

Beatrice responded to Meili’s astonishment.

That was the answer to the reason behind the sudden enhancement of the Feathered Moles—— Force, was a mix of weight and velocity.

Feathered Moles navigated underground using their potent horns; the risky assault of the Witchbeasts which flew about in the sky and the underground at will decisively halted the steps of the titanic scorpion with unbelievable destructiveness.

The titanic scorpion’s defensive capability was quite impressive, but it was unable to defend itself completely against an attack it was witnessing for the first time. And, in order to surpass that reflective defense capability, Subaru fully rotated his head.

Subaru: “I feel bad for the Witchbeasts, but it’s a tradeoff between life and time. There’s plenty of quantity and varieties of Witchbeasts that can be used, with Beako’s assistance the possibilities are infinite…! This way——”

They can succeed, that definite response made Subaru clench his fist and Beatrice’s hair. Beatrice with an “It hurts, I suppose!” raised her voice in protest—— And that was when.

Subaru: “——Ah?”

With the plan to buy as much time as possible, Subaru spilled out a voice whilst looking up towards the Watchtower.

Hearing his vacant voice, Beatrice turned around saying “Subaru?”, but he remained unable to respond.

What was brought to Subaru’s consciousness, was not the visible exterior of the Watchtower, but its interior—— the interior of the Tower whereby he could sense fleeting lights at various locations, the reason was the responses of his comrades.

Likely, it appeared each one of them must be engaged in vehement battles, amongst them a single one’s response vanished—— The response of Emilia, who was heading to the top.

Subaru: “————”

That moment, Subaru’s heart throbbed so intensely as though it were to explode.

The reality that Emilia’s response had vanished threw Subaru into a state of chaos. What if, within the couple of moments just now, Emilia had been lost——

Subaru: “——Hk, calm down, you damn idiot.”

He halted his vision from blackening through a reprimand of his own.

This was far too early to despair about reality. He needed to trust Cor Leonis’s ability more. Though its origin laid in the worst kind of a man, but now that it had blossomed, this Authority was an ally.

Based on the responses of Cor Leonis until now, it could be assumed that the intensity of the fleeting lights’ warmth and movement conveyed the status of his allies.

When they became violently worked up, the colors or intensity of the lights changed. The opposite applied as well.

Then, did the disappearance of Emilia's response refer to her Death?

Subaru: "If that's the case, then the rate at which the response disappeared happened way too instantly."

If it were to be assumed that Emilia had encountered an enemy so fearsome it was able to extinguish her existence in a single instant, even if she had fallen victim to that, he could not imagine her being taken out without resistance.

He could not imagine, neither did he want to. He had belief. That was why, the problem perhaps lied somewhere else.

Rushing up the Watchtower, Emilia had headed for the First Floor, and something had happened which made her body go out of the range of Cor Leonis's influence.

Thus, in but a single instant, Emilia's response had disappeared from Subaru's perception. He must believe so, otherwise——

Beatrice: "Subaru!"

Meili: "Onii-san! This is no time to space ouuut!"

Gnashing his molars and gums, Subaru kept himself in check through pain as the two young ladies called out to him.

Hearing them, Subaru responded with "I know" such that both himself and they could hear it,

Subaru: "I have no idea, whom she may have to confront and where. But I believe, that she'll make her way back."

△▼△▼△▼△

——At the same time as when Subaru had pronounced words of prayer, far below on the sand.

Though Subaru said that he did not know whom she may have to confront, there was no way that even Subaru's imagination could have predicted the situation Emilia had been placed in.

Abiding by Subaru's command, Emilia had headed to the First Floor in order to rewrite the rules of Pleiades Watchtower—— what she encountered had been an azure, shimmering, gargantuan existence clad in scales.

An existence whose name, nobody was unaware of in this Kingdom of Lugunica—— no, in the entire world.

If the Witch of Envy was regarded as the symbol of fear, then it was the befitting symbol of hope and faith. For this existence had continued to accumulate meritorious deeds of such scale for the world.

The name of that gargantuan and great existence——

Emilia: "——The Divine Dragon Volcanica."

Ruminating the name it had given for itself, Emilia felt her entire body run cold.

Though a strange thing to say, Emilia's predisposition was entirely detached from nervousness. Though of course she felt her body be heavier when she had to stand in front of people or when she had to talk about something crucial, but upon undertaking practical action she would immediately forget about their effects.

On multiple occasions she had been praised by Subaru or Ram for having that impressive quality.

However, despite possessing that impressive quality, Emilia's physical movement had ceased completely before the Divine Dragon.

Such that she felt she could not take even a single breath without the opponent's permission. To such an extent, the presence of a true Dragon was projected, and seized its grasp on the world.

Emilia: "————"

Whilst inhaling, Emilia once again glanced at Volcanica's frame.

Scales with a deep tinge of azure were shimmering like jewels, and every single one of them appeared to have been tempered thoroughly, as if sharper than any treasured sword.

Its forelimbs and hindlimbs were endowed with black claws akin to stone; its face, similar to that of a ground dragon, gave the impression of having lived for long, donning a pair of golden eyes that had witnessed an unfathomable amount of time. On its head were two enormous horns, white like fresh milk.

The Divine Dragon's stature was likely about fifteen or sixteen meters in height. Since it was not standing, and had its wings and tail folded, its exact enormity could not be determined. But because t it was this gargantuan, it was a matter-of-course that it could not be fit inside the Tower.

It was unquestionable that the First Floor had been constructed in an open location because of Volcanica.

Emilia: "…The Third Floor was the Sage, the Second Floor was Reid, and the First Floor is Volcanica."

Volcanica: *"————"*

Emilia: "Could it be, that all Three Great Heroes from antiquity, are involved in the Tower's Examinations?"

Looking back onto the Examinations up till this point, Emilia discovered a similitude between them.

The Three Great Heroes—— they had formerly made efforts in the sealing of the Witch of Envy, and were three heroic figures engraved into the history of the Kingdom of Lugunica. Those being Shaula, Reid, and Volcanica.

Furthermore, Shaula had stated that it was actually an achievement of Flugel's, Reid was incredibly violent and talked crudely, and Volcanica was not a person but a Dragon.

But if they were yet connected in this place, then——

Emilia: "To still be friends after so many centuries, that's reaaally wonderful."

Emilia thought it was a very wonderful thing if something like commitment or unity, had tied the three heroic figures together.

On top of that, Volcanica was the existence who had pledged a Covenant with the Kingdom of Lugunica, and as a matter-of-fact, when a black dragon had been rampaging within the Kingdom of Lugunica multiple decades ago, it had been recorded that it possessed extraordinary power.

Emilia, loved those who viewed promises as important.

She believed that upholding promises was a very nice thing. She cherished Subaru and trusted him, but she believed his characteristic of not upholding promises was no good.

What if Beatrice started imitating him?

Neither did Emilia wish to scold Subaru and Beatrice for breaking promises.

Emilia: “Ah, whoops. This is no time to be thinking all that… Um, Volcanica! I came here to take the Examination! The Examination of the First Floor! I’ll tackle it!”

Volcanica: “————”

Emilia: “I don’t know how tough an Examination it will be… But, I ask of you to hurry! I must hurry or Subaru and the others will be in trouble. Whatever it may be, bring it on!”

Striking her cheeks with her hands, Emilia reorganized her cowering emotions.

Without even planning so, thinking about Subaru and Beatrice made the root for that. Even if they were to be scolded by Emilia for breaking promises, that was speaking of a distant tomorrow, a distant future.

In order to come face-to-face with that future, Emilia needed to stand firm here.

Volcanica: “————”

The silent Divine Dragon was intently watching Emilia with its golden-hued eyes.

Speaking without exaggeration, those eyes felt deep enough to absorb her entirely.

It had fought the Witch of Envy, and forged the Covenant with the Kingdom of Lugunica four-hundred-years prior—— but, the time this great Dragon had lived through appeared to be far greater than those four-hundred-years.

Those eyes, perhaps close to reaching a thousand years of age, were intently gazing upon the world.

It was unknown in what way would Emilia’s existence be projected, to this Divine Dragon.

Emilia: “I, am used to being judged. There are people who hate me because I’m a half-elf, or meanies like Echidna… But, like Subaru, Ram or Beatrice and everyone else, there are also people who have laid their expectations on me.”

Whilst addressing, Emilia touched the crystal on her chest with her fingers.

Her family, who was yet asleep, was the first one to affirm Emilia, who largely looked through rose-colored glasses like this.

With that family of hers as the beginning, in this Tower were her comrades who had accepted Emilia.

Emilia: “That’s why, I don’t care no matter how you look at me!”

Before the Divine Dragon she had been overawed by once, Emilia declared sharply.

Even the existence known as Emilia, who had been crushed by the contrast in presence, whose limbs had been quivering and cowering, who had been overwhelmed by the existence acquainted to eternity, would no longer lose.

——No matter what, she would not lose.

Volcanica: *“————”*

Emilia strengthened her fist and made her amethyst eyes glitter with might.

Whilst being showered with Emilia’s gaze throughout its entire body, Volcanica slowly blinked. Afterwards, Volcanica moved its dragon jaws with grandeur——

Volcanica: *“——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner.”*

Emilia: “————”

Volcanica: *“——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit.”*

Emilia: “…Huh?”

Emilia, who had packed her breath and put herself on-guard for the challenge Volcanica may ask her of, heard the cumbrous words accompanying the Dragon's breath and tilted her head.

For she had remembrance of these words.

Emilia: "Um, hadn't you told me that earlier? That I'm the one who arrived at the First Floor, and that you're Volcanica… is that right?"

Volcanica: *"————"*

Emilia: "…Ah! Did I not introduce myself, by chance? I apologize. I am Emilia, just Emilia. Well, there's many people right now who don't remember me, so it'll be a problem if you ask me to prove it, but, I'm Emilia!"

Volcanica: *"————"*

Emilia: "…Still, no good?"

Thinking whether her omitting her introduction had brought its displeasure, she reintroduced herself, yet no positive change was born in Volcanica's response.

Had Subaru been here, he would have gone so far and thought that skipping one's introduction would lead to the revocation of the right to take the Examination of the First Floor, but Emilia did not think that way.

Emilia believed that even if a mistake were to be made, upon apologizing, the other person could not continue being so heartless.

Thus, even at this instant she did not believe her impoliteness had bought Volcanica's silence.

What Emilia had thought of, was the possibility that Volcanica was not angry. But even if that were to be the case, it might've been much worse than simply being angered. After all——

Emilia: "Could it be…"

Gazing back into its golden eyes, Emilia timidly moved forward.

One step, two steps, resuming her walk in a place close to the sky, she shortened the distance between herself and the Divine Dragon Volcanica. Emilia inched closer, as it breathed, that too with magnificence.

And, gently stretching her hand forward, she touched the scales of the other being's front leg.

Emilia: "——Cold."

The scales she touched were cold like ice, or like steel which had cooled down.

Just how long a duration would one need to remain stagnated, to lose this much heat.

It did not mean biological Death. Those who remained stagnated for a long duration, simply lost bodily energy.

Volcanica: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

Emilia: "————"

Volcanica: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

Whilst gazing down upon Emilia who was touching its foreleg, Volcanica repeated once again.

Words of reception that had been repeated and stockpiled exactly thrice. They were not with the purpose of condemning the mistake Emilia had made with her greeting.

Volcanica's eyes, which were profoundly staring at Emilia, were reflecting her as if not reflecting her.

The reason was evident.

Emilia: "Could it be, you became such an old uncle that you forgot about the Examination…?"

Not the death of the body, but the death of the mind had hunted the long-lived Dragon.

And for Emilia, who must clear the Examination of the First Floor, it befell as a challenge beyond the Examination of the First Floor.

The Great Library Pleiades, the Examination of the First Floor Maia.

Time-limit, the time for the survival of her comrades. Number of attempts, unknown. Challengers, one. content of the Examination, unknown.

——Examination, start.

Arc 6 Chapter 81 - ——Pleased to Meet You

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 5 “Mental Death”, Part 3, and Volume 25, Chapter 6 “Good Loser”, Part 1

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Due to being left alone for umpteen years, the Divine Dragon Volcanica had met its Death of the mind.

Speaking tangibly, it had become senile due to being left as is for a long time, or thereabouts.

Emilia: “But, it’ll be a problem for me if you’re such an old person! Hey, Volcanica!”

Volcanica: “——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner.”

Emilia: “Geez! So hopeless!”

Emilia knocked its foreleg and called in desperation, but the response she got was the sensation of resilient scales and forgetfulness that seemed even more resilient than the former, a psychological barrier.

The Examination which brought back the dead from the time they were alive, Reid’s case, had been quite the challenge, but thinking of it now, that seemed cute compared to this.

Though something like calling that thug Reid cute was like a joke in itself——

Emilia: “Reid could be communicated to, and he also taught us what all we needed to know, but…”

That was not the case with Volcanica.

For Emilia, who must conquer the Examination of the First Floor, the test conductor having gone senile was pretty much the worst scenario.

Even though she needed to take back the good news from here to Subaru and the others as soon as possible.

Emilia: “Ugh… What can I do what can I do, what should I do… It can’t be, that I need to beat Volcanica like it was with Reid…”

For argument’s sake, should it be the case then that could be expected to make for an extremely arduous Examination, but the difference in the content of the First and Second Floors’ Examinations made Emilia hold off on that thought.

The Examination of the Third Floor, Taygeta, had required solving the set questions through brainpower.

Fortunately, Subaru possessed the knowledge from beyond the Great Waterfall, thus they had been able to solve them, but without that it certainly would have been incredibly onerous.

And, the Examination of the Second Floor, Electra, as one may know, had had Reid Astrea as the obstacle.

Emilia had won it by somehow doing her best and banging Reid’s head, but even that had the aspect of succeeding because it had been their first time challenging.

In any event, it was indubitable that both the Third Floor and the Second Floor had been won extremely narrowly.

That was why, a simple challenge alone was sufficiently difficult, and yet——

Emilia: “To think it won’t even specify the challenge…”

Volcanica: “——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit.”

Emilia: “Geez! I get it already! I want you to say something beyond that, you know!”

Though she expected it to say something beyond after a certain number of tries, she did not quite have the time to experiment that.

Whilst staving off the feeling of wanting to stomp the floor, Emilia turned her line of sight to her environs.

The Examination of the Third Floor had been conducted in a white room, with a black slate where questions would be set—— there had been something which Subaru and Julius had been enjoyably invoking with the Monolith.

Perhaps there may be something similar hidden in this First Floor.

As long as Volcanica could not be addressed to, it was a good plan to search for the problem by oneself.

Emilia: “I’ve got to do everything I can right now…!”

While always paying mind to Volcanica’s behavior, Emilia began sprinting in order to survey the First Floor.

Firstly, the First Floor was the uppermost stratum of the Pleiades Watchtower—— existing in a position whereby it was too high up to be visible from below. Within its space, in the surroundings were six pillars, and one mammoth pillar in the center—— Volcanica was crouched by the central pillar as if leaning on it, and the vastness of the space was around a hundred meters in radius.

Though the space felt quite vast compared to that of the Second Floor, part of it was being capped due to the presence of Volcanica’s enormous frame.

Emilia: “Seeing below… isn’t possible?”

Grasping one of the pillars enclosing the circumference of the First Floor, Emilia confirmed what was beneath.

Inside and outside the Tower, Subaru and Ram and everyone else were supposed to be putting up tough battles, but thick clouds blocked her field of vision, rendering her unable to confirm what was below her.

Though on the other hand, it felt like should she jump into the clouds, it would be possible for her to join up with her comrades——

Emilia: “It feels like if one cheats and climbs up from the outside like this, they’d be getting a scolding… No, in the first place, there’s no way it’s possible to get above the clouds so fast, just because I ran at my fullest.”

Though she was quite athletic, even Emilia knew how high an altitude the sky and clouds were positioned at.

When she was little, she had tried to extend her hand and grab the clouds, but failed. Even when she had grown up, that had not changed. Should she reach around Reinhard's level perhaps she may be able to jump up to the clouds, but Emilia did not have the ability to do something like that.

That was why, Emilia must have reached the summit of the Tower because of some mysterious powers.

Emilia: "If that's the case, then the Examination must be here or it'll make no sense!"

Her thoughts encouraged, Emilia went around seeing the six pillars, knocking them, trying to climb on them. However, she could not discover any befitting phenomena or writings whatsoever.

If there were to be another possibility, then——

Emilia: "The big pillar in the middle, which Volcanica is close to."

If the surrounding pillars did not have anything, then the central mammoth pillar possessed the greatest possibility.

Unlike the other six, that pillar alone stretched further beyond the First Floor—— Otherwise, above even the First Floor, the place which should be called the Zeroth Floor was perhaps situated there.

It felt that in that place there may be some means to cause any changes to this place, which remained ever unchanged. However——

Volcanica: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

In order to investigate that pillar, she could not avoid Volcanica, who continued repeating the same words.

Emilia: "————"

Though she was ready to take on the Examination of the First Floor, being ready to take on Volcanica was an entirely different subject.

Maintaining that nervousness, Emilia distanced herself closer to the central pillar, to Volcanica.

Emilia: “Volcanica, what should I do for the Examination?”

Volcanica: “——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit.”

Volcanica’s answer would not change.

Rather than being despondent or dejected towards that answer, Emilia instead felt relief. If Volcanica’s answer did not change, then just as when she had touched its foreleg, it must be uninterested in her.

Believing that, Emilia went around through the other side from Volcanica’s, in an attempt to investigate that bulky pillar——

Emilia: “——Huh.”

The moment she tried to touch the pillar, Emilia heard the sound of wind.

Before even confirming its cause, Emilia instinctively produced an ice wall overhead. In an instant, the impact went through the ice wall and slammed into Emilia, throwing her slim figure afar.

Emilia: “Kah, hah.”

The impact pierced her chest from the back, and Emilia tumbled down the floor of the First Floor, coughing violently. During her movement, she halted her momentum by putting her hand to the floor, managing to arrest her body as it had been blown off somewhere.

Thinking just what in the world had happened, Emilia slowly raised her face, and noticed.

——The tail of the Divine Dragon leaning on the pillar, was slowly being lowered to the ground.

Emilia: “…I was hit, by the tail?”

Upon expressing it in words, it could be noticed that it had been an extremely simple attack.

Dragons using their tail to express their emotions was something which often occurred between Patrasche and Subaru as well. When Subaru played any pranks, Ram and Patrasche would slap him as if competing with each other.

However, the attack by Volcanica's tail was not of the same kind as an expression of love between dragon and man.

She had taken only this much damage thanks to her sudden defense, but had Emilia's response been late her neck would have been fractured, even her head being blown away would not have been strange.

On top of that, for Volcanica, this had been like nothing but merely brushing away an insect in a state of vague consciousness.

She felt as if she were a tiny insect being toyed around by the feet of a gigantic creature.

Emilia: "————"

The moment she realized that truth, cold sweat traced Emilia's nape and spine. But at the same time, it also made another possibility emerge before Emilia.

Emilia: "So that pillar has something after all, right."

Volcanica: "————"

Emilia: "After all, you are here for the purpose of the Examination. You have not forgotten that, even now when you've forgotten the Examination. That's why you're explaining the same thing over and over."

Volcanica appeared as if it had forgotten what it ought to do.

But the reason why the Divine Dragon still remained here like this, was its will to uphold promises exchanged before its mind had met Death, that alone was firm proof.

The Sage, the Sword Saint and the Dragon, each for testing wisdom, power and intent[282].

[282] This may be a reference to Legend of Zelda. The words used for "wisdom" and "power" here are the same used to describe the Triforces of Wisdom (知恵) and Power (力), which are a key concept to the series. The last one, "intention" (志), does not match with the third, missing element of the Triforce, which is the Triforce of Courage (勇気).

If that was the case——

Emilia: "——Half-baked feelings won't do. I'll be doing it seriously as well."

Premising on the existence of the opponent's hindrance, Emilia declared the exercise of her true strength.

At that moment, the atmosphere surrounding Emilia slowly let out a note, and began to congeal. As if obeying Emilia like she was queen, warriors of ice were created and summoned—— that was, Emilia's new potential born through further growth from Ice Brand Arts.

She had not been able to even test it within the confined Watchtower, but should her opponent be in a space so vast, there was no need for her to be merciful.

She had not told Subaru about this, so she had not gotten it named.

Thus, she would do the naming.

Emilia: "Ice Soldier-san and, Ice Brand Arts…!"

The seven warriors of ice born forth, having taken humanoid shape, all held their respective weapons, and gallantly accompanied Emilia's challenge until the point of their death.

Emilia: "——Here I come, Sleepyhead-san! If you want to wake up, then make sure to wake up fast!"

Whilst speaking so, Emilia, wielding arms of ice, approached Volcanica along with the warriors of ice.

Whilst lording over that with eyes ignorant to emotion, Volcanica opened its mouth.

Volcanica: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

With its consciousness, buried beyond the ever-unchanging infinity.

△▼△▼△▼△

——During the same time, Emilia was not the only one facing a mighty enemy transcending one's own strength.

One floor below Emilia who was fighting the demented Divine Dragon, the collisions of swordsmen being performed on the Second Floor Electra also grew in vehement.

But, a one-sided truth remained unwavering.

???: "Comeoncomeoncomeon, whathappenedwhathappenedwhathappened! I'm just havin' to use one chopstick with one hand, ya know? If ya still ain't reachin' me, ya prick, then this ain't gonna make for even just playin' 'round, ya prick, ya prick, aye ya prick~!"

???: "Guh… Hk!"

Whilst pouring hearty jeers, the man making his long, red hair sway about fired an intense kick.

Receiving that with the handle of the Knight's sword in his hand, the knight with a refined profile jumped far back by his own volition. He could not stifle the impact. He had merely scattered it. And before it could dissolve, the next one arrived.

Many a time, many a time, the repetition of that exchange was conducted on the battlefield of the Second Floor.

And though this had occurred many times as well, the knight was blown away by the swordsman's strike, and as he retreated far back, the swordsman spat out a "Geez, damn it".

???: "If yer mood changes then yer sword does too. I've got expectations on ya with these explosions, ya know? But still, how many goddamn times'll it take for ya to change, ya prick. Or instead…"

Whilst saying that, the red-haired swordsman—— Reid, wrung his neck and distorted his lips.

With a magnificent posture of mockery as if looking down onto his opponent, the swordsman with expectations scowled at the Knight who was his opponent,

Reid: "Are ya plannin' on losin' by fussin' over yer manners, ya prick. Are ya gonna be satisfied by that, aye, ya prick?"

???: “——What, a self-indulgent thing to say.”

In response to Reid’s objection, the Knight, who was being told anything per convenience, loosened his lips.

Whilst confirming his Knight’s sword numbed by the kick, the Knight accepted Reid’s sharp gaze and stood up, directly opposite to him.

Julius Juukulius, who had relinquished being a nameless Knight, and was resolved to battle destiny.

Julius: “Many a time, you have thrown such words at me. Unappealing battling, unmannered sword moves, lackluster amusement… they are words, even I am familiar with.”

Reid: “Hah, figures. Even if it ain’t to my extent, pretty sure anyone’d feel that by takin’ a look. There ain’t anythin’ in yer sword, but desperation.”

Julius: “…Desperation, huh.”

Reid’s careless remarks surely must not have been brought forth by noble beliefs.

He was likely stating what he thought, as-is. The reason why it grasped reality, with one of his eyes purposefully concealed, was because everything was visible in plain sight to that blue pupil.

He could likely see Julius’s shallow ideals concealed above his true character.

Julius: “————”

Upon glancing behind, the form of a female watching over the fight between Julius and Reid could be seen.

For Julius, it was the guise of the woman whom he currently esteemed the most in the world, however, the woman’s substance had been changed to that of a different person.

Inevitability aside, it had been approximately two months since the events that had occurred in that Watergate City—— they had managed to resume quite an empty lord and retainer relationship.

Julius: “Now that I think of it, both you and I should have conversed further with open hearts.”

“Anastasia”: “Julius…?”

Julius: “Had that been done, I am sure I would have become good friends with you. Because we shared our cherishing, and admiration, for the same woman.”

Letting his heart out, Julius challenged the Sword Saint once again.

Reid was wielding a short, slim chopstick in his right arm and assaulted the advancing Julius head-on.

Slashing through, clearing away, holding aloft, swinging down, striking in.

At times, Julius tackled whilst weaving together reality and myth through the grip of his sword or his footwork, which Reid defended against with ease and a striking lack of seriousness.

Reid: “This again, aye. How many times do I gotta tell ya this ain’t gonna work…”

Julius: “Even so! If you are to call it dull, this is still my sword!”

Reid: “Here ya go!”

Repudiating the rising yawn with a roar, Julius fired a sword slash which was met by Reid’s kick.

His stance destroyed by that kick, Julius showed an opening to which Reid’s chopstick strike attained a diagonal posture—— that instant, Julius overturned the mantle he was wearing and instantly hid his body afterwards.

Reid: “Heh.”

Reid smiled at that move, and slashed both the mantle and Julius, who was on the other side.

However, the moment the mantle was blown off by the power of the chopstick strike, Julius jumped right behind and to the side, escaping the range of slaughter of the chopstick.

Reid: “Hey, now that’s more like it!”

Julius: “No, you are wrong!”

Reid: “Huh?”

Reid praised the battling style of using the white outfit as a distraction, throwing off the righteous path. However, Julius immediately slayed that praise and ran up to the mantle that had gotten blown off.

And, picking up the mantle that had been torn by the chopstick strike, he put it on his body once again.

Carefully fastening its latch, putting the white mantle on with his white uniform, he personified knighthood.

Even if he had given up on being nameless, he could not give up on being a Knight.

Witnessing Julius's attitude as if denoting that message, Reid once again clicked his tongue in displeasure.

Reid: "Hey ya prick, when the smokin' hottie earlier 'n the hottie standin' behind'cha showed up, I expected ya to change, ya know? That ya'd aim for victory without carin' 'bout appearances. That I'd get to see that kinda you, aye? Ya prick, aren't'cha clueless 'bout yerself?"

Julius: "————"

Reid: "Ya act like ye're sittin' straight bein' a Knight, but yer interior ain't that. Yer interior's the same as me, that of a Stick Swinger. So stiff I can't stand lookin' at'cha, ya goddamn prick."

Whilst pointing his chopstick towards Julius, Reid spat out with a bitter expression.

Hearing Reid's comment, Julius closed his eyes. And, keeping his eyes shut for some time, he whispered "Is that so" once.

Julius: "I feel like I finally understand."

Reid: "Huh? What'd ya understand?"

Julius: "About why you are so, persistent and obstinate, about me."

Despite being irritated, Reid never ceased his words for Julius.

His way was violent, and said person surely had no such intent whatsoever, but it was akin to that of a precursor teaching, guiding Julius.

Finally, he now comprehended the reason behind why Reid had pulled Julius around this much.

Julius: “——Did you see something in me, which was the same as yourself?”

The reason why he had, on multiple occasions, sneered at Julius, calling his battling style boring and his sword moves mannered, was because he believed there was a slumbering lion within the shell Julius put on.

Though Julius thought, to believe that was a lion was quite a excessively positive estimation——

Reid: “I ain’t got any idea ‘bout the finer stuff, ya damn immature fool. I just do stuff however I wanna do it. My instincts’re tellin’ me. That ya’d be more interestin’ with yer veneer taken off.”

Julius: “————”

Reid: “That’s why I’m tryin’ to peel it off. Ya get it too, right? That at this rate y’ain’t reachin’ me, ‘n neither will ya get to look cool before the hottie standin’ behind’cha, aye.”

As Reid turned his chin up and pointed Echidna out, and Julius smiled bitterly.

Thinking that truly, Reid’s eyes were something else, they were observing well.

——They had perceived well, that Julius Juukulius was a man of merely affixing appearances.

Julius: “That is precisely why, I will not depart from the fact that I am myself.”

Reid: “The hell’d ya say?”

Julius: “Your words are surely correct. Many things come to mind… Though I never spoke about it in a world where everyone had forgotten me, I am not a legitimate child of the Juukulius family.”

He commenced speaking, ensuring Reid, possessing a frown, and Echidna, who was firmly observing what was in front, could hear him.

The unremembered history of Julius Juukulius which now, nobody remembered but Natsuki Subaru.

Julius: “My father, who absconded from a noble household, married my mother, who was a commoner, and I was born between the two of them. That is why, my origin is that of a commoner. My parents

passed away, and until I was adopted by my current adoptive father, my uncle, I had nothing to do with the refinement of nobles… Thus, my way is one that is fabricated."

Reid: "What a damn ugly paper tiger."

Julius: "That may be true. My true essence must be clad in civilian clothes instead of ceremonial clothes, and must be the rustic child unaware of ideals from the time when I used to run about in open meadows, laughing with my friends."

Ignorant of propriety, possessing no ideals to strive for, earnest in living day after day.

Precisely that way of being himself was the future that had been bonded to Julius.

However, that future was washed away along with his real parents by a flashflood, disappearing into the beyond.

That was precisely why——

Julius: "That is why, I shall feign the Knight. Being fixated over appearances, I shall confine my original self."

Reid: "Ya prick…"

Julius: "My innocent, ignorant self was however, met by ideals—— I admired the Knight. Admired the form of the Knight, possessing gallantry and integrity. Hence, I shall go through with my admiration."

Fastening the latch of his mantle with a note, strength was poured into Julius's yellow gaze.

Reid was in displeasure, his expression changed from one of irritation to dubiousness. That was his astonishment for his words being denied, yet not being snarled back at.

The man, like a painting of defiance, had his awareness eroded by Julius's words.

Henceforth, Julius presumed with a grand voice.

Julius: “I am a gauche man. I perceive everything based on appearances. Till now, I have believed that if I wield a splendid sword, if I wear dignified clothing, if I use courteous words, I would become befitting of them. Thus, I shall stick through with that obstinacy.”

He was aware, that there existed humans who despised words such as appearances.

Natsuki Subaru, whom he immediately thought of, was he not the epitome of that?

However, Julius also thought of something inverse.

Julius: “Correcting my posture, completing personal grooming, dressing up as the form wishing to be equipped with that, holding the will to persist through. That is precisely the paper tiger I am determined to wear for eternity.”

“____”

Julius: “I am sure there are those who mock appearances. However, I trust that there are just as many who find appearances to be dazzling—— Just as how I, continued to yearn for the way of the knight.”

He could not remember, who it was that made his admiration for the Knight bud.

However, Julius had become a Knight.

The reason why Julius was called the “Finest”, was not simply due to diligently studied sword moves, refined Spiritual Arts, or the heights of his ability backed by those factors.

It was because the way of Julius Juukulius, had been thought of as the way of the Knight.

The reason why it was the way of the “utmost excellent Knight”, was because his form, putting up appearances, had been perceived as dazzling.

Making that declaration, Julius loosened his lips and turned towards Echidna.

Julius slightly shook his head sideways, towards her, who had borrowed the form liable to his utmost respect and affection—— Towards her, who was regretting from the deepest depths of her heart, that she did not remember Julius.

In order to convey, that there was no need to harbor such guilt.

Julius: “There was no need whatsoever for me to fear, console, lament being forgotten. Because the existence known as myself is present precisely within the chivalry which everyone knows, which everyone yearns for.”

And, he could say the same for “those girls”, who were with him in this place.

Julius: “I apologize for everything till now, oh buds of mine. Clinging to a lost bond, without parting ways with you all, I have always made you anxious. I shall free you from that burden, this instant.”

Allured by Julius’s whisper, what became visible were fleeting lights of vivid hues—— they were beautiful Spirits asserting six elements, Julius Juukulius’s Quasi Spirits.

They were existences difficult to be distant from, having remained close to Julius Juukulius from a point prior to him becoming a Knight.

They too, had forgotten Julius who had gotten his Name plundered by the Authority of Gluttony.

However, due to the indelible Contract formed between the Spirits and the Contractor, along with the Divine Protection of Gathering Sprits which Julius had been born with, they were captivated by the power and continued to remain within his vicinity.

Julius too, believing that their relationship would return should his Name return, did not let go of them.

How foolish that had been.

He must have not wanted for what remained to change as well, after anything and everything had undergone change. However——

Julius: “You did well staying with my prior self till now, oh buds. I depended on your love, and stubbornly remained without letting go of your warmth. I kept expecting to possibly return to those days, with no problems whatsoever—— I shall relinquish that weak, pathetic, uncool self of mine.”

As if bewildered, the six Quasi Spirits swayed whilst enclosing Julius’s environs.

Facing them, Julius firmly presented his hand. The arm extended like a perch, upon seeing it the Quasi Spirits gently gathered there.

And, Julius smiled towards the fleeting lights halted atop his hand.

Julius: “There existed a self of mine which feared change. However, upon having not the resolve to lose, there also exist things that cannot be gained. For example, the blooming of the buds named love. A future where I confirm with my own eyes, what flowers will the buds who remained by my side blossom into.”

Buds: “————”

They did not answer.

However, it appeared they knew well, what was going to occur hereafter.

Hence, Julius moved abiding by that flow——

Julius: “O buds of mine! I liberate you all. I apologize for clinging to a fragmented bond for much too long.”

With those words, the Quasi Spirits which had encircled Julius’s hands took distance as if flicked away.

That which appeared to even possess a physical impact, pierced through Julius and the Quasi Spirits alone with certainty, a sensation scathing like a flash of lightning.

The connection, the bond which existed for certain, the Contract binding soul to soul, was severed.

That was the pain and grief of having forfeited an existence indeed bound to the soul, which only a Spiritual Arts User could comprehend.

Though Julius would not know, this same pain had once made even Emilia move to tears and cower.

By his own volition, Julius experienced parting ways with his six Spirits once, and a wound was born in his heart.

The sensation akin to distortion rent his mind and heart, and Julius tasted the detachment of his soul.

This was, a pain differing from when he had been forgotten by his buds due to the Authority of Gluttony, from its very origin.

Not Julius alone, but the Quasi Spirits must have also experienced the pain, ergo he repented.

They might have sustained a wound on their soul, conveying that they should not have made a Contract with a human. However——

Julius: "——Furthermore, now once, I call for you all."

Buds: "————"

Julius: "I love you all. If you shall accept the courting of this vain man, then let us bind it—— A new Contract, between myself and you all!!"

With a loud voice, Julius hollered with a hand raised towards the heavens which he had lowered once.

Hearing that call, the Quasi Spirits which had dispersed as if repelled, quietly, flickered for merely a moment.

Faltering and indecision, those had been matters of naught but a moment.

△▼△▼△▼△

Warm luminescence enveloped the entire body of Julius Juukulius.

Gently permeating into the wound engraved on his soul, due to severing the Contract.

There had been glee. There had been rage. There had been grief. There had been love. There had been hate.

These multitude of emotions had been there, in the time, greater than ten years, that Julius and those girls had spent together.

Repudiating it for once, they spun a future anew.

Whether that was the correct answer, he did not know. However, he thought, that he wanted it to be the correct answer.

He may make mistakes, countless times.

Continuing in failing to choose the correct path, he may err.

However, he would shape himself through that journey.

Even if he were to err, he was not alone. He was not by himself.

Should he decide to move forward, then there existed ideals molded by splendid predecessors.

Should he halt his feet, then there existed the warmth of his buds who had continued to watch over him with deep affection.

And should he look beside him, then there existed the side profile of his lord vowing to dedicate beliefs that shaped oneself.

Just what did Julius Juukulius have to fear, in the future?

Julius: "——That must be true. O beautifully blooming maidens of mine."

Responding to that cry, the six buds—— no, the blooming maidens gave their answer.

A light, was born——

△▼△▼△▼△

Julius: "From hereafter as well, profoundly, gently, whilst being hurt, I shall walk this path."

The pain of the Contract's severing was healed by the bond tied together once again.

Clad in six, exceedingly ever mysterious lights, Julius Juukulius looked forward.

There present was the form of the pinnacle as one who had dedicated his body to the sword, whom he admired.

However, Julius Juukulius's jealousy was directed someplace different.

Hence, he would slash through that longing and aspiration without faltering, through the lights of a rainbow.

Julius: "Thank you for waiting, Sword Saint Reid Astrea—— Pleased to meet you."

Shaking his Knight's sword, Julius grasped his mantle and bowed with elegance.

And lifting his face, completely taking shape of "that" which he admired the most in the world, he named himself.

Julius: "——I am the Finest of Knights, Julius Juukulius. The sword of the Kingdom, that shall slash you down."

六つの、以前にも増して神秘的な光を纏い、
ユリウス・ユークリウスは前を見た。
「お待たせした、『剣聖』レイド・アストレア。
――お初にお目にかかる」
そして顔を上げ、この世で最も憧れる
『それ』になり切って、名乗る。
「――私は『最優の騎士』、ユリウス・ユークリウス。
あなたを斬る、王国の剣だ」

Arc 6 Chapter 82 – Shackle-Accompanying Battle

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 5 “Mental Death”, Parts 4-7

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Slowly, gradually unfastening her shackles step-by-step, she let her body heat escalate.

She could feel her blood boil, and sense all the muscles in her petite figure be pressed and strained.

Soft on touch, it was the body of a young girl which seemed even transient and helpless, but the blood flowing within it, the flesh and bones which composed it, belonged to the utmost excelling species in the world.

And even therein, it had been christened as the reincarnation of the Oni God——

Ley: “This is what you’re about, nee-sama! Ahhh, how utterly wonderful you are! You’re glittering! No matter how much effort, Rem couldn’t possibly ever attain you reach you rival you, that is how nee-sama is!”

Ram: “Stop spitting around. It is unpleasant. Also, kindly stop comparing Ram with something.”

Ley: “Ehhh, why so?”

Ram: “Isn’t it obvious—— It is because any title aside from Rem’s nee-sama is unneeded for Ram.”

Declaring with apparent disgust, Ram twisted her frame as her elbow rebuff drilled into the air.

Slashed upon touch, broke bones upon striking, a fearsome technique which pierced even into the insides, this was being performed lacking all frugality, as she fired a chain of strikes utilizing all of her limbs.

These were not moves governed by simply physical ability or technique.

Had it been brought forth by pure finesse, then Batenkaitos, who reconstructed all kinds of techniques of the past and the present, of east and west, relying on the Memories of eaten opponents, could have surely dealt with it.

However, Ram's battle techniques marked a concise difference from that.

Ram: "————"

Stepping in, the elbow and knee strikes which Ram fired changed their velocity midway through. That was because Ram clad herself in Wind Magic which she specialized in, and wove truth and myth together in the midst of the battle.

Accelerating or decelerating speed with wind, she derailed Batenkaitos's cognizance as he counterattacked. In the end, Ram utilized wind and scattered her presence in all directions, and whilst slipping into the opponent's blind spot with nimble carriage of her body, struck countless fatal blows.

Ley: "Haaa! How irresistible~!"

Whilst agilely evading those attacks of Ram's, Batenkaitos acclaimed with a joyful expression.

Whilst bleeding from his cut right cheek, disheveling his unkempt long, dark-brown hair, Gluttony was enjoying comparing his own ability to his opponent's.

Ley: "Hot, irresistible *spice*! Acerbic refinement, a gallant *trick*! Making joyfulness explode, truly *dynamic*! Nee-sama is, a feast perfectly suited for our gourmet![283]"

Flying about the spiral staircase, Batenkaitos laughed whilst shifting each other's positions.

Making the daggers on both of his arms collide with Ram's wand, and opening up distance, saliva dripped down from his open mouth.

Ley: "How nice, so nice, quite nice, very nice, as it's nice, isn't it nice, as it's probably nice, certainly it is nice, because it is certainly nice! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!"

[283] "Spice", "trick" and "dynamic" are all Engrish. I don't want to lose my mind nor I want this to read like complete crap because of all the language flipping, so I'll only italicize it. Forgive me.

Ram: "————"

Ley: "Above all, what's nice is the scent of that rage. An opponent, who gives us, personally, this much hatred… We wonder what kind of a gourmet delicacy will we get to have a fill of, upon tasting that atop our tongue eeeh!?"

Clasping both of his hands, Batenkaitos shivered about with an incomprehensible premonition of pleasure.

Whilst witnessing that, Ram took a deep inhale and confirmed the condition of her own body.

Ram: "Though far from its original condition…"

Despite not letting it show on her face, in her truest heart Ram had been struck with admiration.

Unlike the fools for whom it was a cliché to baselessly claim that they knew themselves the best, Ram truly had a complete understanding of herself.

Having lost the horns that marked the Oni Clan[284], Ram's body, which had become "hornless", was under the threat of being crushed by an enormous burden on a daily basis. Thus, Ram placed shackles onto her own consciousness.

Normally, when working as a servant, she did everything with those shackles on.

At times there were situations of emergency, and she had no choice but to utilize magic and do away with the situation. On those instances she unfastened one shackle and allowed herself a bare minimum utilization of magic.

And, in circumstances which could be sorted despite that, she unfastened two shackles, and though only in short decisive battles, Ram demonstrated about twenty-percent of her original strength.

[284] Technically, Ram only lost one horn, even though the Oni Clan is characterized by two. There's a bit of a problem in language compatibility here, however, in that oftentimes, in Japanese, it's not expressly stated if a noun is singular or plural. Hence why this sentence seems a bit odd in context, because there's no way to transmit the simultaneous double meaning of "(one) horn" and "(multiple) horns".

That was around what she had done when she had faced and fought Garfiel in the Sanctuary, approximately a year-and-a-half prior.

Ram had confidence, that that was the maximum strength she could bring out as “hornless”, and her body would not be able to endure any further and become disabled.

Those shackles, a double-edged sword, right now, had already been unfastened that much by Ram.

Ram: “————”

At that moment, an unusual vacillation distorted Ram’s innermost heart.

As aforementioned, Ram perfectly understood herself.

For her, this absence of feeling recoil after fighting this much was something which had not happened to her ever since she was truly a child around ten years of age.

Should the recoil of having fought this much rebound, Ram’s head would ache as if fissuring, she would incessantly bleed from her nose and eyes, so she must prepare herself for her body being rendered unusable for some duration.

That was not present here—— Because it was flowing into Subaru, whom she shared a collective destiny with.

Ram: “…If this takes too long, Barusu will die, isn’t it?”

If everything was going by as they had discussed, then about now Subaru must be making efforts in order to deal with the rampaging Shaula, or the advancing hordes of Witchbeasts.

With him was Beatrice, and perhaps Meili—— Emilia, who made her memories throb, headed for the upper strata of the Tower, and perhaps was putting up a fierce struggle as a solitary force.

Mysteriously, some part of that silver-haired girl’s positive attitude made her curious. Without question, she was someone whose hand Ram must have held multiple times and guided, before she had gotten her Name stolen.

Each and every single one of them, were helpless and unreliable without Ram.

Henceforth——

Ram: “Kindly endure with the intent to die, Barusu—— Rem will cry, otherwise.”

Thus, hurling those inaudible words, Ram unfastened her third shackle, after an interval of ten years.

△▼△▼△▼△

——That instant, Natsuki Subaru gnashed his teeth due to the recoil of Cor Leonis.

Subaru: “——Gueh.”

As if vomiting blood—— No, it was indeed the burden of vomiting blood.

For a single instant, he felt one of the fleeting lights within the Tower enlarge, and the next moment it assailed down upon Subaru.

Beatrice: “Subaru!”

Subaru: “——Hk!”

Letting out a cough mixed with blood, Subaru’s stance crumbled as Beatrice, who was by his side, supported him.

Unfortunately, what Subaru and Beatrice were currently riding was not Patrasche, whom they had grown accustomed to riding on, but a Witchbeast who took no regard for a living being riding on it, a Hungry Horse King.

He had very few experiences of riding without the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion, and since there was no saddle to place one’s buttocks on or a stirrup to have one’s legs supported, a single moment of carelessness would result in being thrown off.

The reason why that had not happened to him so far, was because he was using his Guiltywhip as reins by wreathing it to the Witchbeast’s upper body, and because Beatrice was restraining his bodyweight through an elaborate magic.

Subaru could not allow himself to let that persistent effort go to waste.

Beatrice: “Did Ram’s recoil reach, I suppose.”

Subaru: “Just as you conjecture, indeed… Sorry, I’ll somehow put up with it… Hk.”

Reaffirming his grasp onto the whip, Subaru responded to Beatrice, who had a good sense of judgement.

His rising vomit tasted and scented like rust, and he did not have the slightest idea just which part of the body’s burden this was.

His internal organs letting out a creak, or something inside of his body being fractured, perhaps the damage was of that kind.

Regardless, this was the proof that Ram had gotten serious.

Subaru: “If Ram, could clean up the Gluttony side…”

He would not say the situation would easen instantly due to that.

First of all, he did not even possess confidence whether Gluttony being crushed would result in restoration of the Names and Memories it had stolen. He possessed confidence merely in the fact that Subaru’s burden would be abated.

——Should that be, Subaru would be able to concentrate in taking up the inferior physical form of Meili alone.

Meili: “Hah, hah… Hk.”

Clinging to the Hungry Horse King’s upper body, Meili was giving commands to the Witchbeasts whilst risking her life.

In order to face off against the titanic scorpion aiming for Subaru whilst fiercely shaking about its pincers and tail stinger, Meili’s risky battling was indispensable.

Insufficient war potential could not be supplemented by material resources, Subaru and the rest pushed themselves and created a stalemate which did not exist.

For that purpose, Subaru had been neither playing around nor joking, but rather absolutely serious in shouting the comment that it was vital to admire Meili like a princess.

At present, though Emilia, Ram and Julius and the others' strength was absolutely necessary for each respective obstacle amongst the five obstacles aiming for the Pleiades Watchtower, but the one necessary to maintain each of those battlefields was nobody but Meili Portroute.

Thus, already for a while now, Subaru had been taking up the feedback from her Divine Protection which rained upon her.

Meili: "Feathered Mole-chan! Courtesan Bear-chan! Together!"

With a shrill voice, Meili pushed the Witchbeasts to their death whilst overlooking the battlefield.

Clapping her hands, clicking her fingers, or sometimes giving orders with her voice, though her way of action depended on the Witchbeasts, her Divine Protection was being used at full throttle for all of them to abide.

Subaru realized that it brought about suitable burden, by feeling as if his own brain was aching, becoming swollen.

Subaru: "————"

The grace brought forth by Otto's Divine Protection of the Soul of Language or Meili's Divine Protection of Fiend Manipulation, felt much more like an expansion of human ability rather than something magical.

Upon expressing it, it seemed like a power in the field of psychic abilities, instead of magic.

If that was the case, then it was also understandable that its feedback would be far greater compared to other Divine Protections.

In the sense that the Divine Protection's object was not the surroundings or other people, but it worked only upon oneself.

Subaru: "After all, Divine Protections and Authorities are both a part of an incomprehensible system…"

The Authorities, wielded by the Sin Archbishops and the Witches, and Subaru, by some twist of fate.

Or, the Divine Protections, which had a possibility of being bestowed upon those born into this world.

All powers have some way of being put to use, though even Subaru recognized that was truth of a certain kind——

Subaru: “It’s because something like that exists…”

He could not stop thinking, that it could give rise to tragedies.

The context behind why the Sin Archbishops and the Witches were feared, and their audacious power, was unmistakably greatly concerned with the strength of the Authorities which allowed nobody else to get close.

Even Divine Protections, if things like those did not exist then there could have been countless people who would have lived without their destiny being distorted.

If an example were to be taken, even Meili was a victim to the negative aspect of Divine Protections.

Since she possessed the power to communicate with Witchbeasts by birth, she had been abandoned by her true parents—— He was unaware of whether that was true. However, it was a convincing elucidation. Self-evident logic.

At the very least, that was the truth within Meili’s heart.

That was precisely why——

Subaru: “I, really have *nijyuukijyun*[285]…”

On one side, he thought he did not want to rely on Authorities or Divine Protections, but upon rise of necessity he did not think twice before using them. Though it was true that a weak human possessed limited choices, he did not want even his heart to coarsen by that.

He was walking down a path which should not even be a path, he never wanted to forget that fact.

[285] Engrish flip. Means “double standards” (二重基準), originally “ダブルスタンダード” (double standards).

Meili: “Onii-san! Are you concentratiiing!? If onii-san or Beatrice-chan get done in, then that’ll be the end, you knooow!?”

Subaru: “I know—— What do you say, Meili. Once everything’s over, wouldn’t you become my daughter?”

Meili: “——Hk! Like I said, concentraaate!!”

Meili howled in response to Subaru, who made that enquiry whilst enduring the heaviness of his head.

Neither of them, had any leisure. Should their concentration vanish, everything could end in but a moment. However, but still——

Subaru: “After putting up with this much suffering, it wouldn’t make sense if you won’t think that a happy tomorrow awaits.”

Yes, whilst vomiting blood, that was the thought which came to Natsuki Subaru’s mind.

△▼△▼△▼△

Whilst resuming the battle on the sand, Meili whispered “Something’s wrong with me” to herself.

Of course, there were plenty of things that could be labelled as something being wrong with her.

The same went for Shaula before her eyes, who had transformed into the titanic scorpion, the same also went for Ram, Julius and the others who were fighting various opponents inside the Watchtower, and it was especially the same for Subaru and Beatrice, who were fighting alongside her.

However, the one who had the most of something wrong with oneself, was certainly——

Meili: “Me, isn’t iiit.”

Why was her self becoming like this, Meili herself had no idea about herself.

In fact, Meili believed she had started undertaking action unbefitting of herself from the moment she accompanied Subaru and the others for their journey through the Augria Sand Dunes.

As per the flow, as per the need, regardless of whether right or wrong, she had continued to meekly submit to everything that was ordered to her.

Since that was Meili's secret to success in life, she had intended to do the same here as well. And yet——

Meili: "——It's because, something like the Book of the Dead exists."

Upon hearing it was possible to personally experience the feelings of the dead, Meili had been defeated by the inquisitiveness dwelling within her.

Possessing no choice but to unseal her emotions towards Elsa Granhiert which had always been soldering, resultantly, Meili ended up amassing blunders utmost unbefitting of herself.

In the end, being taken to task for that, she had even ended up being lectured a great deal from Subaru.

Though she did not feel like simply doing away his calls with a snicker.

For some reason, she was even made to promise cooperation thereafter.

Though Subaru had even told her, she would always have his back to look up to, she wondered to what extent did he intend to take responsibility for that, and whether he belonged to the type of people who first said rash things then later regretted them.

In the sense of easily being swept away with the flow, many things came to Meili's mind as well.

However, what differed between Meili and Subaru, was that he did not offer mere lip service.

If Subaru said he would do it, then he would surely make efforts to do it, and the one who was present at the scene of the promise—— was it Beatrice? Beatrice would certainly also try to make him uphold that.

If that was so, she felt as if she was being arbitrarily spoilt, and also that she should help someone, but she had not been told anything like that till now.

Meili: "————"

Even now, the hordes of Feathered Moles flying about and responding to Meili's hand gestures were being struck down into bits and pieces by the titanic scorpion's tail stinger.

Normally, the timid Feathered Moles would never charge towards an enemy larger than themselves, but even Meili, who was able to walk over that instinct of theirs, could not make them stronger.

Meili: "Ahhh! They're done fooor!"

Swinging about its colossal pincers, the violence of the enraged titanic scorpion killed the Witchbeasts one after the other.

The blood of the slashed, crushed, torn Witchbeasts permeated into the thirstful sand, and the sand which appeared yellow changed its form to a dark-red hue.

Meili: "——Hk."

Grinding her teeth in response to that reality, Meili nimbly turned her eyesight to her environs, probing the presence of the Witchbeasts in the sky, on the sand, or even underground, and tamed all those who could be tamed.

Without concern for quality. What was necessary at this moment were resources, an inexhaustible number of pieces under control.

Meili: "Geeez, geeeez geeeez geeeez! Because of this, I'm definitely having onii-san listen to whatever I demand later, okaaay!"

Devoid of even the flexibility to wipe off the sweat on her forehead, Meili slammed harsh words towards Subaru, who was restraining the titanic scorpion from a distance neither too close nor too far.

Even for Meili, the back of the Hungry Horse King did not make for a pleasant riding experience. However, in Meili's case, she had stabbed the mantle enveloping her body through to the Witchbeast's back with a knife, forcing her body to remain fixed.

It was a Witchbeast under her territory of control. It could accept that level of injury without any problems.

The problem lied not in the Witchbeast, but in the strength of Meili who had been placed into that situation.

First of all, this last moment kind of battling wasn't Meili's way of doing things.

Meili's battle style was that prior preparation meant life—— arranging to place the Witchbeasts around within Meili's territory of control, deploying them in the battleground, and then watching their conjunct assail from distance.

That was precisely what the specialty of the Witchbeast Master, of Meili Portroute, was.

Of course, directly giving orders in the battlefield enhanced the precision of the Witchbeasts' offense and defense, but even that was something Meili need not perform were it to compromise herself. Because she had blundered in that choice, Meili had lost against Subaru and the others in battle, and had become a prisoner.

Meili: "Elsa…"

The reason why she had died, was also due to the repetition of such blunders.

Of course, neither would Elsa ever wish for Meili to reproach herself, in fact, it was possible she thought nothing of having to die. That was why, she could not help but get anxious.

Just as she did not understand Elsa's feelings, she did not understand her own feelings too well either.

First of all, though she was taking part in stalling against the titanic scorpion like this, and forcing through buying time in exchange for the lives of the Witchbeasts, Meili had never done things this way even once.

Though young, Meili Portroute was a killer.

Taking someone's life on command, order, request of someone, was her occupation.

That was why, this was the first time for her.

——Fighting in order to help, to save, someone's life.

Meili: "This, isn't my way of doing things, okaaay!"

Subaru's earlier words, akin to incoherent muttering, were excessively infuriating.

Quite a thing to ask, *wouldn't you become my daughter*.

With an attitude as if he had no hint of being hated by others, truly provoking.

Even if her direct enemy was Garfiel, it was Subaru who had constructed those circumstances. Just as he had indeed constructed the circumstances in this Pleiades Watchtower as per his own freedom as well.

Meili: "————"

Indeed, though she thought of Subaru's words and deeds in negation, upon taking notice Meili herself had abided by his commands, and was moving like a piece to set up the board just like the other members.

If that was the circumstance constructed by Subaru's farsightedness, then it was still convincing.

However, no matter what, Subaru did not seem like someone of that caliber. What Subaru possessed was merely desperation, self-assertive expectations, and insane faith as if entrusting his own life——

Meili: "It feels like, I've turned into a stupid fool as weeell."

Whilst pronouncing so, Meili drew up the Witchbeasts she had grasped in the underground, and made them aim for the titanic scorpion.

Meili: "————"

Exploding through the sand sea dyed red, what flew out of the underground was a Sand Earthworm, its large frame trembling about. Twisting its enormous build which was greater than ten meters in size, it heartily collapsed into the titanic scorpion.

Crushed underneath, swallowed by the sand, a magnificent victory—— there was no way things were going to proceed so smoothly, though.

Blown by the corona's torrent, the sand earthworm's thick trunk was scattered in an instant.

As the Sand Earthworm fell over with its body divided into two, splattering out bodily fluids with a strange noise, it was smashed with further precision by the successive attack of the tail stinger.

However, that was a smokescreen of blood and flesh utilizing the life of the sand earthworm.

——The three Hungry Horse Kings which appeared from underground which the Sand Earthworm had broken through, were the real deal.

Hungry Horse Kings: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

With a howl akin to a child's crying, the flaming half-human half-horses launched a suicide assault towards the titanic scorpion.

Though multiple kinds of Witchbeasts called the Augria Sand Dunes their home, the ones which were the utmost excelling in terms of standalone firepower were these Hungry Horse Kings.

Using the Feathered Moles, which were large in numbers but could not make for a decisive blow, or the Courtesan Bears with extremely low endurance, and the Sand Earthworms which tried to crush with their enormous builds altogether as cover, Meili had preserved the real deal.

Drawn by the traces of this battle, the three Hungry Horse Kings had gathered here.

They fell behind the titanic scorpion in terms of fighting strength, but these were the Witchbeasts which the opponent was utmost vigilant about. That was the indisputable proof of the fact that it sensed the firepower of the Witchbeasts to be a threat.

Meili: "Looks like I'm fine after all."

One which Meili herself was on, one on which Subaru and Beatrice were seated, and the three Hungry Horse Kings which she had prepared for this strike, the burden of making all of them move at the same time must be befittingly, substantially heavy.

Meili was, however, not experiencing that recoil right now, mysteriously enough.

It was possible that the battle's enhancement let that happen, and if that was the case, then she would like to presume upon that.

She did not think of bringing the enemy down.

However, should she be able to land even a slightly deadly blow, then it would also ease achieving Subaru's purpose.

Meili: "————"

——In a certain sense, this may have been the third time the young girl named Meili, who had lived her life going by the flow, had desired to do something by her own will.

The first was when she had wandered around the Watchtower at nighttime, seeking salvation through the Book of the Dead.

The second was when she had been mentally cornered, and had drawn close to Subaru's back as he stood by the spiral staircase.

And, the third, with the purpose of buying time, seeking a result greater than what was expected of her.

Subaru: "——Meili!!"

The moment the three Hungry Horse Kings approached the titanic scorpion, a scream accompanied with blood beckoned Meili.

That was, quite literally, Subaru's voice as he bled by the edge of his mouth.

Meili was puzzled, because it was neither exultating, nor joyful, nor admiring.

She wondered what was there to be so angry about, when she was doing her job this well. However——

Meili: "——Huh?"

Wielding lances of spears, the three Hungry Horse Kings viciously had leapt upon the titanic scorpion.

No matter how efficiently was it to use its pincers or tail stinger, it would fail to block it, so had been her expectation—— but she took notice, upon observing the change that occurred on the titanic scorpion's body.

As if it had been scorched by flames, or as if it had sipped blood just like the sand.

The exterior shell that had been shining dully like blackened steel, changed its color as if opening its eyes. An instant later, a second later, the jet-black color of the shell, had changed to blood-like red.

——In certain kinds of Witchbeasts, there were those who invoked a transformation called Offense Hue.

The transformation caused their behavior to change with a distinct difference from normal, and they became aggressive with greater ferociousness.

As a transformation easy to grasp, the outward appearance changed in the majority of cases. The inflation of the Hungry Horse Kings' flames, or countless eyes being yielded throughout the body of the White Whale, also corresponded to the same.

And that was something the titanic scorpion—— no, the Crimson Scorpion corresponded to as well.

Becoming further aggressive, further destructive, further deleterious——

Meili: "——Ah."

A white sheen was fired in all directions, making the onrushing Hungry Horse Kings vanish in thin air.

At the same time, the aftermath of the wild corona thrashed about, as if mowing down the sand sea. And——

Meili: "————"

Swallowed by the torrent of exploding light, Meili's petite figure fluttered in midair, a spray of blood accompanying.

△▼△▼△▼△

——Enhancement overflowing with the sensation of boiling blood, she had despised that ever since she was a child.

Omnipotence which seemed as if she could govern all things in this world.

Had the time of her being intoxicated with that hallucination continued, no matter how firm a spirituality she may have been blessed with, time would have unquestionably made her err in her path.

She was aware that she surpassed others. However, she did not lay too much trust in that.

She also made mistakes. Simply by possessing a will to not make mistakes, and a stance to correct mistakes.

The reason why she had been able to embrace that will, was also thanks to her not being intoxicated with omnipotence and acting like a fool.

Thanks to her not committing the misunderstanding of believing she was something wonderful by going along with the extravagant praises of her surroundings, and remaining without becoming a yes-man of those who revered stale traditions and old-fashioned mystiques.

And, the reason why she remained without being crushed by such surface reasons, was thanks to whom, she wondered.

She knew, that it was surely thanks to something which could not be remembered, something which was missing.

The reason being——

???: "——After all, Ram is not only cute, but also wise."

Deserting words of her own praises, Ram's unremitting footing smashed the difference in stair levels of the spiral staircase.

That instant, the peach-haired Oni clad in wind swung her arm, crushing the arm of her opponent who tried to block it. Twisting it in an instant till the wrist, elbow and finally the shoulder, she fractured it.

Ley: "——Gah."

She would not let the grumble of agony reach.

Knocking her fist to the side of the face about to give rise to a bawl, Ram's fair fingers turned into buckshot.

With countless blows fired onto his entire body, Batenkaitos jumped away whilst vomiting blood. Pursuing him, Ram rode on the wind she had produced below her feet, and leapt extremely high up.

Ley: “Hihi.”

As if to intercept Ram, Batenkaitos swung both of his feet around whilst midair.

The following instant, the created distortion of space came in contact with Ram’s shoulder, and slashed her clothes, skin and flesh albeit shallowly—— A leftover souvenir of a blade invisible in the air, an impudent trap brought forth by Wind Magic.

Ram: “Something of this level——”

Ley: “You’re saying that you will blast it away with wind? Won’t do won’t do, useless useless! As it’s something that’s been fixed in space, you seeee! Even nee-sama wouldn’t be able to kick it away, how unfortunate, too baaad!”

Seeing through her plan beforehand, Batenkaitos, with a bloodstained smile, kicked the air.

Though he was not truly kicking the air, but was using the blades which had slashed Ram as a foothold, walking in midair—— using those whose positions were known only by him as footing, he freely flew about the spiral staircase, which heavily made use of the Tower. However——

Ram: “——Clairvoyance.”

Even if she were not able to capture that within her perception, should she be able to overlap with the field of vision of established humans, she could grasp the hiding spot even with the slightest change in consciousness.

As Gluttony tried to escape upwards and upwards into the air by using his traps as footings, Ram overlapped with her opponent’s field of vision and using the same as footing, bolted towards him with conviction.

Ley: “Huh! Ahahahahahaha! Seriously, nee-sama? Are you for real!?”

Ram: “What a Barusu-like thing to say[286]—— It’d help if you’d stop this tug of war.”

Batenkaitos was surprised, and having jumped through the air faster than his ascent, Ram looked below towards his creepy face.

And, she mercilessly drove in the bottom of her shoe towards that face, with an opened mouth lined up with sharp fangs.

Ley: “Buh.”

Ram: “Alright, let us see how many times you will be able to get a taste of Ram’s shoe until you fall below.”

With his snout crushed, Batenkaitos’s petite frame rolled over midair.

With the vigor of his ascent killed off, this time Gluttony was made to fall directly below due to the strength of Ram’s kick at the same pace.

Pursuing him, Ram raised both of her hands towards the heavens, yielding wind in her palms and swiftly, towards the falling Batenkaitos’s face, hammered a second kick downwards—— no, a third, a fourth, and continued hammering kicks in.

Mercilessly, Ram’s heel kicked into his nose, his teeth, his chin, his forehead with each shot.

She had found that sneering face, and that mouth which time and again had called Ram “Nee-sama” to be unpleasant.

She intended to spoil them both, as their descent yet resumed. Incidentally——

Ram: “It is not Ram’s fault even if you get hit by the traps you laid. You reap what you sow.”

Ley: “Gih! Gya! Higihh!”

Enroute to fall by the kick, the invisible blades he had laid in the atmosphere cleaved Batenkaitos’s body.

[286] It’s not only that Ley has been spamming Engrish left and right (which is not the instance here), but he’s also using some expressions commonly used by Subaru in interaction with Ram.

He was bleeding, and it seemed a few of the wounds had gouged his flesh as well, but Ram would not ignore them.

Ram, did not like to go out of her way and go as far as to make her opponent suffer and agonize.

However, that applied to the cases where her opponent had sympathetic qualities, and if her opponent was a detested enemy of hers, she would not falter in making them squeal like a pig.

Ram: “So? Do you regret it?”

Skillfully halting her body in the air, Ram enquired with her legs remaining on the opponent’s face and chest.

With his face polluted by thick blood, Batenkaitos did not respond to the question, but instead raised the daggers on both of his hands overhead.

In that juncture, both of Ram’s hands, used as swords, struck the opponent’s shoulders, coercively dislocating the shoulder joints.

Ley: “——Aoh.”

Ram: “So? Do you regret it?”

No matter how excellent a technique he wielded, with dislocated shoulders, his arms would not swing.

Whilst looking downwards onto the surprised face with eyes widened, Ram once again repeated the same question.

Ram: “————”

As Batenkaitos gazed at Ram, she tried to search for fright being born in his eyes.

Her motive was to etch in. Fright, anguish, an indefinable sense of defeat. For the purpose of revenge——no, not something trivial of that kind.

Ram: “Rem——”

It was for the purpose, of recovering her. The ginormous number of victims, who had been met by the tragedy of Gluttony until now. For the purpose of recovering the masses who had gotten their Name and Memories plundered and the history they had come in contact with, usurped.

If killing was all that was required, then Ram was capable of doing that even right now.

All she had to do was to have her feet wear a blade of wind and decapitate him with the same toil as when she had kicked his face in. Even if he was a Witch Cultist, renowned for being living foulness, if his neck and body were to be sundered, he would effectually die.

With a process of retribution, by one who was from the village of the Oni Clan which had been burnt to the ground, onto those who had brought about the village's destruction.

After all, she was aware that the character of the Witch Cult was merely repugnant, being a horde of weak buffoons.

Thus she questioned, in order to kill his heart prior to his life.

Ram: "So? Do you regret it?"

Ley: "——Hk, Solar Eclipse!"

Upon hearing the question for the third time, faint trepidation got mixed in even amongst the hue of blood.

However, he disappeared right before Ram's eyes, literally in the blink of an eye.

His disappearance was not at a level of merely being movement at high speeds.

The sensation of the face, the body of her opponent beneath her feet, vanished. However, she immediately got an idea on where Batenkaitos had disappeared to.

Ram: "——Clairvoyance."

As long as she had the opponent's field of vision pinned down, nobody could escape from Ram.

Ram: "————"

Following the field of vision visible to her, she pinpointed the location in the spiral staircase where the opponent was. Upon enveloping herself in wind and catching up to that, she discovered the form of a bald old man wearing something akin to a priest's garb.

That transformation of outward appearance could bewilder and mislead anyone, except for Ram.

However, due to the sharing of the field of vision, Ram had conviction that regardless of what form the opponent may have, he was Batenkaitos.

Ram: "It was said that changing form and disguising oneself was Lust's technique, but what other tricks do you possess?"

Ley: "Ah, ahhhh, shit! Even though there was no intention to use it… No, even though there was supposed to be none…!"

Ram: "——? What are you saying?"

Upon catching up at the spiral staircase, there present was a kneeling old man—— Batenkaitos, as he groaned in agony.

She furrowed her eyebrows upon his attitude, which seemed completely genuine, however, Ram immediately cast aside the resolution of her doubt.

What was momentous, was that the opponent was still alive and breathing, and that his heart had suffered no cracks. Besides——

Ram: "——Cannot take too long."

Though she murmured that to herself, it had already been greater than a minute since Ram had unfastened her great shackle—— though there was some faint burden saddled onto Ram as well, the majority of it was going to Subaru, such was the situation.

Though she had told Subaru to make minute adjustments, but just as she had conjectured, he was arbitrarily taking up the entirety of Ram's burden. He would go to any lengths, in order to act cool.

Something like that, should be done by him just for the sake of those he loved or Rem.

Ram: "——The situation remains unknown to Ram, but are you finally willing to gulp down this side's demand? Kindly restore everything you have eaten as Gluttony up until now. If you do that…"

Ley: "…If ya do that, then what, aye? Are ya proposing ya'd let us off the hook[287]?"

Ram: "No. If you do that, then Ram shall kill you immediately. Isn't it a nice deal? In that one thing, all of your qualities that deserve death shall be pardoned."

Ley: "Bwahah."

Whilst using even an elderly pronoun, Batenkaitos leaked out a similarly elderly laugh.

Observing his conduct, Ram guessed whether this change of form—— that it was perhaps, a necessary procedure in order to use that personage's ability to its fullest.

Earlier when he had completely disappeared before Ram, that was a technique which ought be epitheted as a short-distance spatial leap.

The one who had used that had certainly been the bald old man which Batenkaitos took the form of.

Ram: "But, it is quite strange. If you had this trump card all along, then it would not have been strange to have used it further, earlier. Yet, wonder why you continued to hide it."

Ley: "————"

Ram: "…Do have a reason why you do not want to use it or such? Like being dragged along by the vessel."

Ley: "Good gracious… truly, never've we come across a lady this terrifying… Nooope. Really, nee-sama, you are scary."

Upon the conjecture through the enchased possibility, the form of the old man slowly changed into a small stature.

[287] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Here, instead of using his usual «僕たち» (bokutachi) or «俺たち» (oretachi), the pronoun used here by Ley is «儂たち» (washitachi), which has never been used by Gluttony. This likely reflects the speech pattern of the person Ley transformed into, along with other speech style changes which I've tried to incorporate, possibly hinting towards a mixing of personas."

That was the affirmation of Ram's identification, and also evidence of the fact that the transformation did not make the received wounds disappear at the same time. Batenkaitos was bloodstained, his face was spoiled as well.

Ram: "What about your shoulders?"

Ley: "Relocated them by slamming into the wall. Because it's something that doesn't go well if done just once, you seeee… it hurts, ahhh, it hurts."

As if confirming the sensation, Batenkaitos greatly gyrated both of his shoulders which he had relocated and healed. Witnessing that, Ram introspected that instead of dislocating his shoulders, she should have slashed his arms off from his shoulders.

Or if she were to crush the ends of his limbs, then she might perhaps crush all his absurd tricks as well.

Ley: "Both this and that, forestalling what this side's supposed to do supposed to achieve, everything everything everyyything… how amazing, nee-sama. Could it be, nee-sama, aren't you yourself using an Authority like onii-san?"

Ram: "Truly unthinkable. This is merely Ram's excellent power of insight. Do not group it together with Barusu's incomprehensible instinct. It is unpleasant. Kindly die."

Ley: "Ahhahahaaa, bitteeer. But but, is that so is that so, guess that's so."

Languidly dropping out his torn tongue from his mouth, filled with fangs, Batenkaitos expressed a bloodstained smile. Widening her eyes in guard upon that ominous gesture, Ram let strength flow into her shoulders.

If he made any unusual movement—— No,

Ram: "Before you do anything, kindly have a taste of this."

Before he could make any unusual movement, Ram opted to blow away the opponent's limbs with blades of wind.

There existed ways to halt bleeding. There existed no ways to halt pain, but that questioning would resume until and unless he died. Making that judgement, she struck unhesitating blades of wind. Yet——

Ley: "——The bet, is our win[288]!!"

Whilst basking in the wind blades, the plump, stout man with an unshaved face jumped towards the rear. The blades of wind which should have been able to cleave, rather than merely limbs, even his fat trunk regardless of how thick his skin was, were unable to bring about anything but a light tinge of red on the stout man's skin and were swept off.

Ley: "Nee-sama, wonder if you have a teensy bit of misunderstanding—— Just to let you know, you aren't the only one who's keeping a watch on the opponent, you know?"

As Ram advanced, believing she must not let that giant get away, that voice was thrown towards her.

The subsequent instant, Ram got her throat slashed by one of the leftover souvenir blades, albeit slightly, and her proceed was delayed half a step. Batenkaitos slipped into that interval, of merely half a step,

Ley: "This is our hit, frooom our *approach*!![289]"

The form of the old man disappeared with the speed of a blink of an eye, and the intimidating air of the presence which had appeared right behind her intensified. Granting her not even the time to turn backwards, a mighty fist was hammered into Ram's side, blowing away her slender figure.

Whilst being hurled away, pronouncing "Kah", Ram glanced and observed that the one who had knocked her into flight was a man with a robust physique and a violent aura—— instantaneously switching the forms of three men, the linkage which utilized their special qualities to their fullest——

Ram: "Even so, do not think that a technique once shown will work agai——"

Ley: "Don't think so. Do not think so. Don't think so, you know. Don't think so, indeed. Don't think so, thus. Exactly because we don't think so. Don't think so as it's said!"

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[288] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Here, Ley uses the pronoun "あたしたち" (atashitachi), which may reflect the person whom Ley has transformed into, but it is also a pronoun regularly used by Louis Arneb."

[289] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "A switch of pronouns midway through, the former «our» is «俺っちたち» (orecchitachi), likely reflecting the new person Ley transformed into, while the second «our» is again «儂たち» (washitachi), likely reflecting the old man". I'll add that "approach" is also Engrish.

The form of the hollering Batenkaitos changed into the old man once again, and covered one of his own eyes with his hand.

Experiencing dread and fright upon his movement, Ram stretched her long legs, promptly kicking the wall, testing to take the position in order to agilely spring at the opponent.

However, she could not make it.

Ley: "We[290] are aware—— Rem's nee-sama, cannot continue to move in that fashion without any tricks."

Ram: "————"

Not Ram's movement, but Rem's knowledge had drawn that answer.

Witnessing Ram's movements, who had transcended the confines of being "hornless", Batenkaitos averred that conjecture with resolve, and when Ram returned to the difference in levels in the staircase, he realized that malice. Namely——

Ley: "Nee-sama, we don't really want to compare strengths with nee-sama, you knooow."

Indeed, that cunning old smile vanished as if melting into space.

Temporally instantaneous mobility, brought forth by short-distance distortion of space—— upon that being executed consecutively, withdrawing from the battlefield was a simple, easy matter. Though she had not expected him to respectably fight until death without giving in.

Ram: "Quick to decide escaping. No, rather than that——"

If he was aware of Ram's Clairvoyance, then he would not think he would be able to simply escape.

The reason why he had taken distance whilst knowing that, was because he had realized the time restriction placed onto Ram. And, though vexing, Ram had been made to lose a considerable amount of time.

[290] Translation notes from Witch Cult Translations: "The pronoun used here is once again «儂たち» (washitachi), so Ley likely changes his pronouns depending on the form he takes, accompanied with the possible mixing of personalities."

The burden placed onto Subaru would exceed a minute in duration.

As quickly as possible, she must discover the whereabouts of Batenkaitos, who had escaped into the Tower.

By the time those thoughts dawned upon her, she took notice.

That that Sin Archbishop, a clod of malice, would not slip into the Tower simply for the purpose of escaping.

He was well-aware what the greatest medium of tormenting Ram, whom he was confronting, would be. That was——

Ram: "——Rem."

At last, the field of vision of the evil overlapped with Ram's field of vision, in grasp once again.

Reflected therein was the tail of a black ground dragon, scurrying with the Sleeping Beauty atop itself.

Arc 6 Chapter 83 - Ram[291]

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 7 “Ram”, Parts 1-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——She remembered, anything and everything being scorched, engulfed in red, scarlet flames.

Days of decadence, of calm, of stagnation, met an abrupt end.

Before that maniacal violence, even the title of strongest demi-humans, even the position of the most feared headman in the village, even the ubiquitous love of parents who protected their child, all held no purport.

It was regrettable, that she had been late to take notice of the slaughter’s rampancy.

——No, this time, perhaps the tactfulness of the opponent was worthy of praise.

They were detested, shunned, ostracized by the world.

Therefore, they lurked in darkness, erased their presence, silenced their noise, and had knowledge of techniques to draw near unnoticed.

It would be correct to say, that at the point of the first ambush, victory and defeat had already been incised.

Faint stagnation had been mingled into the atmospheric Mana; by the time her horn had sensed that aberration, it had already been far too late.

[291] More of a fun fact than anything, but when the author, Tappei, first published this Chapter, it’s title was “Hornless”. Turns out, he forgot it was supposed to be Ram’s named Chapter, and fixed that a few days later. See here for a source (in Japanese, however).

First, the people in the village had been halved at the start, leaving less than half of those capable of battle. Adding to that, further half of those had not come about, due to the exigent nature of pondering whether they had been mistaken.

To summarize, their hearts had been putrefied by peace and harmony.

The Oni Clan, once named as the strongest demi-humans, even said to have been capable of bringing about change in the state of affairs of the Kingdom of Lugunica if they had taken part in the Demi-Human War—— even had the "if" of that history occurred for argument's sake, the Oni Clan unmistakably would not have bore great results either.

Anyhow, the half that had been abated by the first assault, were further reduced to another half by the following second assault.

By that point, blazes arose throughout the village, by the time death wails resounded into the night sky illuminated scarlet, all the Onis in the village had inferred the aberration.

However, in those moments, only two had perceived so much as the fall of the Oni Clan——

???: "——Ram! Break out of the siege! It is fine as long as you alone stay alive!!"

With two enlarged gigantic horns, her elder cried with all muscles of his body bulked up.

Her elder, carrying the longsword he specialized in, leapt out of the room, and vented that at Ram, as she slashed the ordinary combatants down using wind. Telling her to stay alive, but that was not because he possessed disquietude regarding Ram.

For it had been her elder who believed with the greatest undiscerning honesty, that Ram herself was the promising, dazzling, gleaming future of the Oni Clan.

The reincarnation of the former glory of the Oni Clan, the Oni God who had advanced domination and conquest in the era of the Witch.

That was the role expected of the prodigy named Ram, and had certainly been his ardent wish as the final patriarch of the Oni Clan, which had all but forgotten battling.

Ram: "Hah!"

She felt like laughing it off with an exhale, finding it to be just ludicrous.

Even in this age, did the wish of the Oni who represented the village refer to entrusting the realization of an impossible dream to the future. He could nimbly consolidate his comrades, attempt to launch a counterattack at the enemy, the options he possessed for taking action were countless.

However, Ram did not intend to offer that as advice to the patriarch.

This night was not the cause.

For Ram had already, since a long time in the past, turned her back towards her clan.

Ram: “Something like the glory of the Onis…”

Worthless. Worthless. Worthless.

Even the reality that the purest blood of that Oni Clan was flowing within her, was repulsive.

Certainly, upon wishing for strength her blood boiled, enhancement reigned over her entire body, a sense of omnipotence as if the entirety of all and everything existed for her sake appeased her.

Truth was, had Ram grown into adulthood healthily, then that sense of omnipotence might have become genuine.

However, Ram did not wish for that.

Within this confined world, rather than putting on airs as the child of god, Ram had a future she sought to choose.

It was, instead of being lionized as the likes of the reincarnation of the Oni God, instead of spending her lifetime as a shrine for her blood relatives who resumed to cling to a glory already met by ruin, something possessing far more worth.

——to.

Ram: “————”

Centralizing her attention to her forehead, she encompassed the Mana scintillating with heat into her entire body through her white horn.

Upon praying for it with might, Ram's perception greatly, immensely magnified, hijacking the field of vision of all that was breathing and living in her environs, she grasped all happenings of the confined village with perfection.

The number of enemies was large, and they had taken positions encircling the village ensuring escape was improbable.

Correspondence at the first instance had been delayed, the only ones who had been able to oppose properly were the half of half, and they too had lost numbers such that the remaining ones could be counted on one hand, indicating the exhaustion of the Oni Clan's spirit.

One person, the elder seemed to be making strenuous efforts and battling, but the enemies who had assembled there were quite well-trained—— the traces of the elder, as he fell into disadvantage, were enveloped in rich Death.

Ram: "——■■."

Cladding her small body in wind, Ram bolted through the village as if a gale.

What those lips enounced, referred to her one and only ■, whom she loved even within the slightest thought. This was not Ram's heartlessness. She was simply renewing her consciousness.

For Ram's parents had been within the first half of people assaulted, and no longer had any hope of their lives being saved.

——Never had she detested her parents.

However, both of them, for better or worse, had been born into this village, had been members of the Oni Clan who chose to die within this village, and had unmindfully accepted a rather lenient perish, so was her belief.

Hence, for them to lose their lives on this night was a certain kind of inevitability. However——

Ram: "——This does not mean, they will not be avenged."

The black shadow obstructing her way, the enemy with its entire frame clad in a robe.

Towards the underlings wielding and romping with the cross-shaped daggers, Ram delivered an unfaltering wind.

Whether they had made light of her as a mere child, or if they simply lacked ability.

Failing to accept Ram's wind blades, the black shadows proceeded to be slashed down from one to the next, giving an atrocious rise to dead bodies in great count. Even then, Ram enveloped herself in wind and resumed her slaughter, as if dancing within the flares.

Should it be likened to, then perhaps it had indeed appeared as if a glamorous dance.

However, in reality, with the swing of an arm Ram robbed life, and each time she made what had shape disappear, dark joy cried for exultation through her youthful mind.

Kill more, so it howled, vehemently.

Her inner self urged her, to pillage blood, flesh, bones, soul, life.

This evening was not the first time she had lent her ears to that appeal.

——Since in the distant past, since the moment she had taken birth, precisely this voice allured her upon the slightest interlude.

It sought the awakening of her inner oneself, apprising her to entrust her life to her blood, her flesh, her bones, her soul.

It appealed to her, that she could kill far more, that she could destroy far more.

Ram could not comprehend just what was so seemingly wonderful about this.

Neither the elder, nor her parents, no one, could comprehend this. Ram did not even feel inclined towards conveying about this, to those who sought of her a duty which departed from her being Ram.

It appeared as if she were being controlled by her horn.

Had she not possessed a firm self, her youthful persona would have been easily swallowed, demolished, and precisely then, she surely would have become the reincarnation of the Oni God in accordance with the desires of her surroundings.

However, she did not become that way. The reason being——

???: "——■-chan!!"

Called by a shrill voice, upon turning back there she saw ■■, irradiated by the blaze.

During that instant, a surging wind dispelled the obstructive crowd of black shadows away, blowing them away into fragments in one go.

And, making haste, Ram headed to ■■.

Ram: "■■…"

Gaze pervaded with fright, with no strength in legs, ■■ had collapsed at that spot.

Extending her hand to her beloved ■, she helped her stand up. In accordance with the elder's wish, Ram must survive. However, not by herself, but together with ■■.

——That had been the instant.

Ascertaining ■■'s safety, for but a moment, she had let her guard down.

By the time she took notice of the presences, she had been encircled, a situation arduous to make even an escape route through. By herself, it would not be impossible. However, if she alone were to survive, then that would be no different from dying.

She possessed no choice but to, come what may, break through the situation.

For that purpose, she shall unfasten all shackles sealing her might, and impel an enraged wind towards the enemy——

Ram: "————"

That must have been an interval within her heart, sired by the sense of omnipotence she abhorred.

A black shadow slipped through the blades of wind, the single burnish it fired tenaciously afflicted her forehead, her field of vision fulminating.

Reclining due to the enormous impact, whilst tasting an excruciating sense of loss, Ram gazed.

Steadily, swiveling, towards the scarlet night illuminated by the blaze scorching the village to nowt, gyrating, a white horn soared.

Apprehending that was her own horn, her slim throat gave way to a screech, begotten by agony and sense of loss.

Whilst screeching, however alongside, Ram detected.

That voice which continued to eat into Ram, ever since she had been born, had become inaudible.

Ah, so it was something that simple, she thought, being amused by her own imbecility.

Whilst watching the horn paint a parabola into the scarlet night——

——Ah, it finally broke.

So spoke her mind.

△▼△▼△▼△

——Devoutly, fervidly, the black ground dragon absconded from the field of vision she shared through Clairvoyance.

On its back was the young girl, bound to be Ram's cherished other half.

One of her wings, unremembered, absent, having bequeathed merely a gaping void of loss——

Ram: "——Rem."

Apprehending what meaning this held, Ram's heart tremored with rage.

Illustrations from Volumes 3 and 25, coloring by DdukaE (source)

Though exasperating to admit, Ram had managed to regain a part of the strength of her heydays owing to Subaru's cooperation, and that potency had overpowered the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Ley Batenkaitos, slowly cornering him into disadvantage.

Ram herself could affirm that, in terms of simply killing him, she had attained a countless number of opportunities.

However, the vexatious Authority he had been endowed with, the existence of the power and ability to eat the Memories and Name of the opponent made Ram hesitate in imprudently taking the life of that blasphemer.

A judgement compelled by, not kindliness, but necessity. But, the result remained the way it was, the result.

Resultantly, Batenkaitos had made free utilization of his Authority and made a safe escape before Ram, and with the same momentum, headed to secure Rem's person, Ram's other half.

His aim was obvious—— because he possessed conviction that he would not attain victory, were he to battle Ram in upright fashion.

Fighting face-to-face, and upon discerning his disadvantage, he had withdrawn, altering the way of action.

Sin Archbishops were nothing of the ilk of warriors. They were existences who acted with avarice for the sole purpose of fulfilling their own desires, possessing not a single reason to be concerned with what path ought to be taken for victory.

Thus, he plotted revenge against Ram who had made him taste humiliation, and to further curtail the time limit placed onto the hornless Ram using Rem's Memories which he had stolen as basis.

Infuriatingly, that strategy was the optimum solution.

Should he seize and gain control of Rem's person, he could incapacitate Ram with ease.

Even should that not be, should he buy any more time, then this camp's war potential would suffer an immense loss. With the flow of time, her chances of victory diminished. Hence——

Ram: “Must catch up to Patrasche, as soon as possible.”

Fortunately, Patrasche, whom Rem had been entrusted to, was a ground dragon so intelligent, it could be said that amongst the battle array assembled within this Tower, it was second only to Julius in reliability.

Subaru and Beatrice had foibles, and Echidna and Meili had far too many unknown aspects to them. Those like Emilia, who brandished an air of being unreliable, were outrageous.

And though complicated, Batenkaitos was evidently tormenting Patrasche.

Despite being capable of running it down in an instant at simply the thought of running it down, Batenkaitos had intentionally waned his onslaught, cultivating an interval through his pursuit, and had been taking joy in a hunt emaciating his prey.

All for the sake of sharing his field of vision, and scorching this spectacle into Ram’s memory.

She could no longer allow him to take any further arbitrary action as per he pleased——

Ram: “——Ah.”

It had been the moment she was enveloping herself in wind, seeking to break into a sprint.

Her field of vision, aiming for the floor above the spiral staircase obfuscated, and for an instant, Clairvoyance came undone. Whilst maintaining the projection of Batenkaitos’s field of vision in her right eye, preserving her own field of vision in her left eye, the scenery blurred further.

That was not all. The heavy exhaustion she could not feel till now, and the gyp and affliction as if her organs were being churned by an invisible hand, descended upon Ram herself.

That was, indubitably, the effect of weariness Ram was ordinarily made to taste.

Subaru had boasted he would take it over through some kind of an Authority, take over the indemnification bound to eternally eat into the “hornless” Ram—— it, rebounded towards Ram.

What dawned upon her forthwith, was the possibility of Subaru having died, vainly and uncouthly.

However, she could judge that was not the case due to the lightness of the burden rebounding onto Ram. Though merely for a few minutes, taking the might Ram had brought forth into account, its indemnification would not be this meager.

It was supposed to be such agony that it should be no peculiarity were she to even literally vomit blood and wobble.

The fact that that had not occurred, though an unforeseen circumstance had taken shape, implied Subaru had not unreservedly withdrawn from the war front.

Otherwise, a progression of events contrasting entirely with the occurred happenings also came to her mind.

Namely, a disaster which Subaru was obliged to take up had occurred onto someone else's body, beyond the burden of Ram's body.

Ram: "Beatrice-sama or Meili, or Knight Julius…"

Her mind drifted in that direction, but affirming that answer held no significance.

What was momentous was that it had now become onerous for Ram to bring forth the might akin to what she had earlier, which had succeeded in overpowering Batenkaitos—— In terms of shackles, merely one was unfastened.

Should she strain herself, it would be feasible for her to unfasten the second one, though that too could not be persevered for more than a few tenfold of seconds.

Thus, in this plight, would she truly even be able to win against Ley Batenkaitos——

Ram: "Why become so weak-kneed—— There is no choice, but to follow the plan for winning."

Even whilst she was spending her time this way, the possibility of her camp's victory continued to be diminished.

At once, Ram stepped on the steps she had nearly missed and darted upwards of the spiral staircase.

——Whilst feeling the void of absence throb, sensing as if she had also, in the past, whilst panting, chased after her younger sister being pursued, just like this.

△▼△▼△▼△

???: “——Dodogyuuun!”

???: “Hahaaa! Truly, it sure is niiice! You sure are doing your best holding out, despite being just a ground dragon, huuuh!”

Whilst continuing to lacerate its scales through the daggers being cast, he commended the black ground dragon scampering through the narrow aisle.

It was bleeding through the slashed and gouged wounds, painful to even look at, however, the ground dragon decisively made a prudent escape, completely discarding its own conditions for victory.

The Divine Protection of Wind Evasion was a hallmark belonging to all species of ground dragons.

As long as the ground dragon resumed running, a large part of the adversity of external factors such as wind or grounding was nullified, affirming the deed of “running” in order to achieve an objective.

Its grace also subsumed the carriage fastened to the ground dragon, or its rider.

In other words, the reason why the Sleeping Beauty, in an unconscious state, bound and fastened to its saddle, had not been ejected yet, mostly owed to the influence of the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion.

Had it been absent, the Sleeping Beauty would have surely fallen into the hands of Batenkaitos already.

Ley: “Amazing amazing, gallant gallant! Despite all the hindrances done here and there in your dash so far, you sure have the nerve to still not halt your feet and keep holding out. Well, if you halt your feet then the Divine Protection of Wind Evasion will be rescinded, and we get the reason why you’d be so desperate, but you knooow!”

Patrasche: “——Dodogyuuun!”

Ley: “Ground dragons, aren’t they nice, they’re indefatigable, and devoted to their masters. Surely, had you been a human, we think you would’ve certainly made for one mouth-watering platter for us of Gourmet! But, but but, butbutbutbutbutbutbut! Though lamentable, our stomach can’t be filled by a ground dragon!”

In possession of will, in possession of a soul, in possession of Memories, in possession of a Name.

Nevertheless, the Authority of Gluttony couldn’t eat “that”, belonging to all which nowise was human.

Thus, Batenkaitos could not adore and cherish the ground dragon directly confronting an enemy onerous to oppose with such desperation and earnestness, through what was the greatest medium of doing so for himself.

Despite him drooling over simply how delicious it seemed, he could not eat it.

That was, as though a meal illustrated onto a painting with the utmost supreme paintbrush—— Rice cakes illustrated onto a picture could not be eaten[292], though a phraseology like that did seem as if it were something he had come across.

Ley: “Ahhh, that’s it that’s it! That’s completely it! When the stomach is feeling so hungry and hungry and hungry and hungry and hungry and nothing can be done! Something like the drawing of food this delicious looking is just letting live and then killing. Isn’t this completely what’s called child abuse!?”

Whilst resuming his pursuit of the sprinting ground dragon, he spouted the clod of blood clogged within his nose.

In the battle immediately prior, his face had suffered damage, and his left eyeball was tumbling as if that eye’s fundus had been shattered. His fangs had been snapped, his tongue torn, blood was ceaselessly cascading down to his jaw, but, none of it mattered.

——Contemplating that Ram, at present, was viewing this spectacle, his innermost heart pulsated.

[292] A reference to a Japanese idiom, translated literally because, well, it most fits Ley, Gluttony and all. “絵に描いた餅は食べられない” basically has the meaning of “dreams don’t come true just by thinking about them, action must be taken by someone for them to be realized”. The undertone here might be that it’s an idiom he got from Subaru’s Memories, eaten by Louis.

Ley: “Nee-sama is——”

Pure, noble, perfect, an impeccable being concocted devoid of flaws.

That was what the Memories slumbering within Batenkaitos implored, and also believably his rational appraisal after having being half-killed, unable to undertake any resistance.

Against a serious Ram, Batenkaitos would not be able to compete—— No, plausibly, whichever Sin Archbishop may it be, they would all get easily killed with a twist of a finger from a serious Ram.

Though possibly Regulus, he might have been able to put up a fight due to the absolute nature of his Authority——

Ley: “Weeell, there’s no way that idiot could kill nee-sama anyway, you knooow. At most, if she couldn’t kill him then she wouldn’t have killed him, but ended it by just dropping him down the Great Waterfall or something, isn’t it.”

Even without having to kill, there existed countless ways of confinement.

Precisely how the Witch of Envy had failed to die even to the hands of the Three Great Heroes, and was imprisoned in the Evil Sealing Stone Shrine at present as well.

In other words, no matter what——

Ley: “For providing hospitality to the greatest, perfect nee-sama, we must arrange for suitable preparation as well or it’ll be quite rude is what it’s about you knooow!”

Dilating his unsteady left eye, Batenkaitos expressed a melancholic smile dripping blood.

Though the ground dragon’s velocity was considerable, indoors it was merely inutile treasure. Much less, since Batenkaitos was capable of chauffeuring across space through a method of traipsing making practical use of Memories throughout times, even entirely nullifying the distance opened in between.

Ley: “As nee-sama’s little sister, we must grow up without any embarrassment.”

With a rising sense of purpose seated in his chest, Batenkaitos hauled the Memories in the depths of his self.

The Authority of Gluttony, in its types existed an ability called Eclipse. It could concisely be classified into two parts, Solar Eclipse and Lunar Eclipse, but its use was extraordinarily difficult.

Lunar Eclipse was a phenomenon wherein the moon was visible as waned—— On one hand, it referred to hauling out the Memories of the eaten opponents, and recreating them in Batenkaitos's own flesh body.

Normally, Batenkaitos would browse multifarious Memories, combining them, and practically utilizing them as a hyper-level synthesis, in what could be stated as this Lunar Eclipse's specialty.

On the other hand, Solar Eclipse was a phenomenon wherein the sun was visible as waned—— Denoting here, a technique wherein not simply the Memories of eaten opponents, but their existence itself was utilized to cover oneself, utilizing them in accordance with their original specs.

Naturally, the original bodies of the techniques' masters served with greater might for having a good command on those techniques.

However, upon transforming the flesh body into that of the opponent, there lied the fear of sustaining far too mighty influence by the opponent's mind, with the possibility of it resonating on a sizeable scale in the future. Hence, unless in a pinch, Batenkaitos or Alphard did not make heavy use of these.

What Ley Batenkaitos and Roy Alphard principally exercised was Lunar Eclipse.

What Louis Arneb principally exercised was Solar Eclipse—— It remained as a last resort which Louis could buoyantly utilize, for she owned no flesh body of her own, and possessed no firm self.

However, having been put halfway to death in his battle with Ram, the moment he reconstructed the Leaper, Dorkell his name, in order to survive, Batenkaitos shattered the shell.

Acquiring a command of Solar Eclipse, which he had not utilized until now due to being apprehensive of losing his self, he had discovered a way for maintaining a firm self.

He could now, better than before, with perfection and devoid of waste, enjoy the main dish named the "life" of the opponent.

Ley: “To grow in the midst of battle, is something which originally wouldn’t have ever happened to a senile old fool like me[293], yeah. Haha! This sure as heck’s a masterpiece! Ain’t that right, nee-sama!”

Thanks to having established a tenacious self, he felt abundantly refreshed.

He wanted to properly show this awakened condition of himself to the wonderful nee-sama. For that purpose as well, he must opt for a method which would exhort her hatred even further.

Scent of rage, flavor of rage, texture of rage, full course of rage.

Should he not surfeit the entirety of what he could experience through someone beloved with all of his might, just what of him would be Gourmet.

Henceforth, to “his self” atop the ground dragon’s spine before his eyes, he would——

Ley: “Speaking of, it’s something that’s never been done before, unexpectedly. Killing oneself by oneself, wonder if this would also make for discovery of new sense of values, you know.”

Patrasche: “——Dodogyuuun!!”

The instant he blinked the world altered, due to the short-distance spatial leap.

The ground dragon, erupting a screech from the depths of its throat, was flabbergasted by Batenkaitos’s arrival, who was supposed to be in the rear, and attempted to run past him directly to his side without halting its legs.

Gallant, truly gallant. However, gallantness served to be nothing but a spice of the tragedies in future.

Ley: “——Palm of the Fist King.”

The oscillating strike of the fist, vigorously stabbed into the ground dragon’s flank.

[293] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Here, for the first time, Ley uses a pronoun for «me», being «儂» (washi) which seems to the pronoun of choice of Dorkell whom Ley transformed into. This emphasises the influence Ley is facing by the Memories.”

Ordinarily, the strike would be fired by Batenkaitos's petite stature, but that was not how it was for Batenkaitos, who had been awakened by witnessing the abyss of death, and had acquired novel strength by shattering his shell.

Neiji Rockhardt's original body, drilled and penetrated the impact through the ground dragon's torso.

The fist of the Fist King which had vanquished even enormous bodies in full amor, in countless deathmatches in the Gladiator Island.

Basking its potency, the ground dragon exuded a voice suggesting fatality, and was vehemently bashed into the aisle's wall. However, the ground dragon continued to shield the young girl atop itself, from the fist, from the wall, from the floor, and from its own build as well.

Tenderly catching the body of the plummeting young girl with its extended tail, it gently dropped her off on the floor of the aisle.

Though supposed to be a female animal, its handling was done with such smartness, all gentlemen could follow it as an example.

Involuntarily, even Batenkaitos could not help but applaud.

Ley: "Hoooweeeveeer~! Even if you're to lay it down gently on the floor and everything, after that the head will courteously be chopped off, and it'll become a present for nee-sama, hopefully you do understand that."

Patrasche: "——Dodogyuuun!!"

Ley: "Alright alright, no violence no violence, it's praise for doing your best."

Even whilst toppled sideways, the ground dragon attempted to crunch him, to which he kicked upwards into its jaws.

Though he seemed to nearly tear up upon its will and maximal of efforts, regrettably, Batenkaitos and the ground dragon were mutual enemies. Even if he could extol its heroic endeavors, they could never look up toward the same sky of triumph.

Should one side be victorious, another side would be defeated. Though lamentable, that was what was called reality.

Ley: “Let’s! Firmly! Bear! That! In! Mind! Okay!”

A pause per word, a scrupulous clamor, he knocked that into the black ground dragon.

With certainty, he had now etched, alongside agony, a lesson into the crouched ground dragon, with shattered cheekbones and forelegs. Fortunately, Batenkaitos could not eat the Memories of the ground dragon.

Thus, nor did he hold any reason to rob its life. He wished for them to both remember this day, together. What remained was——

Ley: “For nee-sama’s sake, by Rem’s hand, nee-sama’s precious Rem shall be…”

???: “——Stop pronouncing such eerie things.”

The moment immediately following the echo of the unyielding voice, his face, dangling above and towards Rem, was potently repelled.

The face raised upon the reverberating voice, it had accepted the direct hit of two heels approaching from the immediate front. Subsequently repelled to the rear, Batenkaitos glided through the floor on his back. And——

Ley: “Ahhahahahahaaa… So you finally were kind enough to catch up, nee-sama. We… huh? We… Us…? ——Rem and we all, had been awaitiiing.[294]”

Steadily, he got up from a sprawled posture through merely the strength of his feet.

[294] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: “Two things here, the first «we» uses the pronoun «あたしたち» (atashitachi), which may be the pronoun of choice of the corpulent man whom Ley had transformed, but is also one of the pronouns regularly used by Louis Arneb, the second «us» uses the pronoun «俺っちたち» (orecchitachi), which is likely the pronoun of choice of the warrior Ley had transformed into. And finally, for the “Rem and we all”, the pronoun used by Ley is «レムたち» (Rem-tachi), because «レム» (Rem) is what Rem uses to refer to herself. Though a literal translation would be a simple «we», that misses out on too much nuance and this is how I’ve tried to accommodate the «レム» in the pronoun. This line truly shows the chaotic mixture of personas Ley is experiencing”.

And upon gazing at the facade of his beloved other half, he observed Ram making an expression as if her first instance of witnessing something.

Ram: “…In this short while, you certainly became considerably ugly.”

△▼△▼△▼△

Ram: “…In this short while, you certainly became considerably ugly.”

That had been Ram’s candid impression, having caught up to a terribly foul and malevolent game of tag.

Batenkaitos’s field of vision remaining in her grasp, Ram had headed to the locus dragging her flesh body in a state of incomplete liberation, placing her trust in Patrasche’s tremendous efforts.

In that aisle a short distance away from the spiral staircase in the Fourth Floor, she had discovered the form of the ground dragon which had been tormented to the point of being in tatters, and Rem who had been laid on her side.

And, the one who had been playing tag with Rem——

Ley: “Ugly you say, nee-sama is crueeel… We, so much, so much, so much you knooow! Cherish nee-sama so much so much somuchmuchmuchmuchmuch.”

Unascertained, his articulation revolved, speech and conduct of reason disarrayed into fragments.

The cause surely being it inducing abnormality onto his mind, Ram could—— no, perhaps anyone could comprehend that with a single glimpse.

For Batenkaitos’s form, was in an equally distorted condition.

Ley: “————”

Reconstructing the hauled Memories in his flesh body, and facsimileing the shape and form of that opponent, was supposed to be Batenkaitos’s ace-in-the-hole, as she had priorly witnessed.

However, it seemed to be a forbidden card for Batenkaitos as well, and the form of Gluttony before Ram's eyes, was any amongst all of the hauled Memories, yet none.

They were blended together, loosely.

With a part of the bald old man who had leaped through space, with a part of the corpulent giant who had taken no damage from Ram's blade of wind, with a part of the martial artist endowed with combat ability reaching holy precincts, as well as the physical features of variegated and profuse other humans, composed the ghastly, ominous appearance of his body.

The length of his right hand and left hand, the size of his hands was dissimilar, tactlessly, even parts of his face were disparate and appeared as if referring to that of someone else.

The trait that remained from the former Batenkaitos, if anything, was the expression of his eyes. But even that by now had possibly become a borrowed article.

And, it rather seemed that Batenkaitos himself remained ignorant to this distorted circumstance.

Ley: "——?"

Batenkaitos had now come to be something, that was nobody.

Before all else, an existence who resumed to specialize in the ransacking the Memories of others, might have been deficient in having a firm foundation of what was called self. That being the cause of origin, he had broken.

And what had taken birth in lieu was——

Ram: "——A monster posing as Rem. To be truthful, never has Ram been this infuriated."

Whilst glancing down onto the face of her younger sister, whom she knew as fragments burying the damaged place of belonging, Ram embraced revulsion for Batenkaitos who had appended her traits in a part of his face as well.

Impressive how he could provoke someone with such precision.

Subaru and him would have made for a good competition of who could irritate more.

Ram: “You did wonderfully, Patrasche. Take Rem, and stand back.”

Patrasche: “Dodogyuuun.”

Responding with voice frail, she covered a bleeding Patrasche behind herself.

Whilst dragging its large build, Patrasche held Rem’s nape in its maw, and withdrew. Seeking to keep distance from the battlefield hereon, but——

Ley: “That won’t dooo, nee-sama. That is a valuable *hors d’oeuvre*… because before surfeiting the *jyuyouryouri*, garnishing is indispensable, you se——[295]”

Ram: “——Kindly die.”

Lifting her leg up to her head, she commenced her sprint with her palm turned towards the face seeking to state an irrational line of argument.

The blade of wind swirling therein, was a minute storm concealing the potency to tear up everything above the opponent’s neck into shreds—— With the matter having come this far, Ram abdicated holding back.

As a result of having tormented him without killing him, searching for a way to restore Memories, she had endangered Rem’s person, and as a matter-of-fact had invited a situation wherein Patrasche sustained immense injuries.

Ram would accept the weight of that truth—— She must offer her heaviest apologies, to Subaru.

And, in order to never repeat that mistake, she carried out her intent to kill.

Even if she were to take the earlier utterance of a destroyed mind into account, the possibility of gaining a decent answer from Batenkaitos was slim. Putting two and two together, this opt seemed correct.

Crushing Batenkaitos, and taking the burden of her flesh body back from Subaru.

[295] More Engrish spam derived from Subaru’s Earth knowledge, or in this case, Flench spam. Hors d’oeuvre is a sort-of appetizer served before a meal. As for the flip, it means “main dish/course” (主要料理), originally “メインディッシュ” (main dish).

After that, returning Patrasche and Rem to the Green Room, and Ram should likely head to back someone else.

That was how far her plans went.

Ram: "————"

On the brink of tearing his face apart with the storm, Ram gazed at the alteration born, in awe.

It was not anything else. Once again, change had been generated in Batenkaitos's outward appearance, that was all.

However, for nobody but Ram, that had been an alteration difficult to let pass.

——On the forehead of that face, wherein a plurality of features had assembled, a single white horn was summoned.

Ram: "That is…"

Truly, from the bottom of her heart, had she been moving by her instincts, she would vail before him.

For in their entirety, Batenkaitos's deeds had been nothing but exasperating Ram.

Ley: "——Nee-sama."

That moment in time, with certainty, by a face the same as that of Rem's, by a voice which seemingly nobody but Rem would vocalize, she was called.

Subsequently, Batenkaitos's behemoth arm hammered a strike, into Ram's petrified face.

△▼△▼△▼△

It was not, fatal.

However, neither was it a hit light enough to be optimistic about.

Her skull and brain undulating, blood cascaded down her nose.

Her feet becoming unsteady regardless of the floor, was the proof of her having sustained enormous damage and injury.

And, the one to have brought it forth, a touchingly lovely young girl with an amiable countenance and blue hair—— seeming a jest as it were, in this site had assembled three faces with the same aura.

Ley: “Please do cry, nee-sama.”

Wafting an ambiance of pleading, whilst inducing tears into those pale blue eyes, his fist swung.

In but a single strike, the impact entered the *medulla* of her bones, or even the soul present in her depths.

Ley: “Please do get angry, nee-sama.”

Her face lowered once her abdomen was bludgeoned, and a punch impaled into her jaw. Though her tongue survived being crunched, her abdomen was bludgeoned once again and she was thrown backwards, falling prey to consecutive elbows into her cranium.

Ley: “Please do laugh, nee-sama.”

The deep affection that voice was subsumed in, abraded Ram’s heart with each word.

Rem, who had always continued to sleep within Ram’s cognizance. Her robbed younger sister, with her Memories erased, whom she was supposed to always be beside, yet she was not anywhere.

She had been looking forward to being called by her for the first time, after her eyes opened, one day, eventually.

Though would Ram have regained the memories of her younger sister at that time, she did not know.

Even if they did not return, even if they did return, her words at that time, would surely be special like a baby’s cry.

That was now being——

Ley: “Please cry.” / “Please get angry.” / “Please laugh.” / “Please suffer.” / “Please smile.” / “Please ache.” / “Please be sullen.” / “Please get excited.” / “Please be bashful.” / “Please sleep.” / “Please blush.” / “Please take umbrage.” / “Please be surprised.” / “Please wish well.” / “Nee-sama.” / “Nee-sama.” / “Nee-sama

Unfastening her shackles until the limit of what Subaru could shoulder, leaping over the limitation she had levied on herself that she would not use her strength greater than for a few tens of seconds, devoting strength capable of ending life with certainty this time.

It stood no chance. Seemingly, none of it could contend against him.

Ley: “Nee-sama, nee-sama, such an expression seems unbefitting of nee-sama.”

Ram: “——Hk.”

A fist by her younger sister, with tapered lips and a dependent expression, made her correct her blunder.

Her face perforated and knocked off, crashing into the wall behind, Ram somehow wielded the pride of not collapsing before the blasphemer. However, at present, that alone took the entirety of Ram’s might, this being the condition she was in.

Just how much time had passed since she had commenced fighting this monster.

Ten seconds, twenty seconds, she had unmistakably far exceeded the time limit she had initially established. The time she felt sensation of held no purport, and the flexibility to count the actual time passed, nonexistent.

However, whether escape had been possible or not was what was utmost portentous.

Carrying through as a substitute doll which sustained all attacks, she had supported Patrasche and Rem’s retreat.

Perhaps that was what her objective had been, but due to being pummeled in the head far too many times, even she could not recall with precision.

Her body was heavy. Her breath was worn. Her head aching, her throat parched, her limbs numb, the old wound on her forehead surging blood forth. From the colorless, white scar, blood rivulet down her face as if a longitudinal slash.

Ley: “——Something so unclean, that won’t do.”

The face traced with blood, was slammed yet again by the fist.

Receiving that single strike, her body slid, and at last her knees lost their capacity to bear her body weight. Within the interval as she proceeded to topple sideways, a faint voice saying “No” split through in between, and a kick was fired.

Defenselessly receiving it with her chest, Ram crashed into the wall whilst her breastbone creaked.

Before one could take notice, the Pleiades Watchtower, supposed to be a firm existence, parted with its sturdiness and had altered into what had resilience befitting of mere raw material.

In other words, also basking in the outburst of violence against Ram, the wall shattered at last.

Ram broke through the stone wall and collapsed into the opposite side of the aisle.

Thick plumes of dust shrouded her environs, as she violently coughed up blood and something of floury texture. That very instant, her broken bones and shattered flesh commenced a great orchestra of screeches, each striving to be the greatest.

Turning her head, she attempted to confirm exactly what location had she been pummeled into.

Ram: “——Ah.”

A muffled, husky breath spilled escaped out of her.

It may have been one mixed with despondency, or deficit sentiment.

In Ram’s line of sight, ahead of the aisle she had collapsed into, were the figures of Patrasche and Rem.

At a distance of a few tens of meters at best—— the time Ram had bought had been markedly longer than the anguish Ram had tasted, the time being ten seconds, which had merely felt protracted.

Ley: “Nee-sama, nee-sama, are you unhurt?”

Barefacedly enquiring about her safety, without treading across the shattered wall, Batenkaitos took a detour of the aisle and headed towards her.

In the meantime, whilst hugging her arm, Ram somehow stood up at her place.

Entrusting her body onto the wall, the tattered Patrasche and her mutually exchanged glances.

Patrasche: “——Dodogyuuun.”

Ram: “…Yes, understood. Once everything is over, let us chastise Barusu together.”

The truth was, she was unaware of what Patrasche had stated.

However, the fact that the black ground dragon made no effort for revision, was proof that Ram’s response had been unmistaken.

Ram: “————”

Ram’s judgement, she was compelled to acquiesce it had backfired.

The fact that she had not killed Batenkaitos at the start, that had developed to be the trigger for everything.

Attempting to rectify that mistake, she had waged combat aiming to instantaneously take his life this time, but Batenkaitos, having survived from the brink of death, ultimately resorted to what was the optimum solution for him.

Consequently, with her asleep younger sister’s living body laid hold of, Ram, as she plummeted into turmoil, faced an onslaught.

She had used up all the cards she possessed in her hand, and the card she pulled turned traitor to her as well.

Though Ram had awareness of excelling in multitudes of facets, she also possessed awareness of being helplessly lacking in one particular facet.

——The serendipity of time.

Ever since the day she’d had her horn slashed off, and had failed the way of the Oni Clan, that remained unswerving.

Above all, she did not possess much attachment to its way. For Ram herself had been the one to find it utmost objectionable in the whole world.

Yet, as fate would have it, she could not help but long for having her horn now.

——No, that would not be veracious. Speaking with precision, she did have the horn itself.

The horn itself presently was with Ram, within her reach. The wand of her habitual use which she always carried with herself—— in that wand's foundation, Ram's broken horn was being utilized.

The horn was a crucial organ that efficiently congregated Mana required by the tenacious bodies of the Oni Clan members.

Therefore, as a catalyst for exercising magic, there existed not another article which Ram was further accustomed to.

For that purpose, Roswaal had taken the pains of retrieving the horn, and had custom made this wand.

Whether in the wand or on her forehead, simply differing positions of the horn, made so immense of a——

So immense of a——

Ram: "————"

Incidentally, whilst pondering over her horn, a particular thought levitated in Ram's mind.

The consequence of Ram mobilizing her knowledge in order to connect possibilities of defeating this situation, through contemplating about the presence and absence of her horn, as well as the truth that she had once overwhelmed Batenkaitos.

Ram, whose horn was broken, and Rem, who remained asleep.

The latter concerned with consequence, but with regards the former—— Just why, had Roswaal retrieved Ram?

Ram was *au courant* of the duty Roswaal sought of her.

She was also knowledgeable of what scheme Roswaal was seeking to carry out in its course.

Ram had also heard that she was necessary for that purpose, that it would be natural once the time arrived, and that he was aware of the means for it.

Thus, Ram purposively intended not to inquire into it until the time arrived.

However, in these moments levitated a thought necessary for Ram herself, for Rem, who continued to slumber, for Patrasche who fought for the sake of the sisters, to survive.

It was a dreadfully preposterous possibility.

However, it also withheld her chest, conveying it was also convincing and reasonable.

Had it been Roswaal L. Mathers, whom Ram had fallen in love with——

Ram: “He would have surely done it as well, with courage befitting being called inhuman.”

Spilling those words, Ram withdrew the wand her thigh was equipped with, with juddering hands.

Intently gazing at the wand she had operated for ten years, and, she vigorously knocked it into the wall.

From the interior of the splintered wand, flew out that which she had not laid her eyes upon for a long span of time.

——As it swiveled and gyrated nearly to an unpleasant extent, just like back then.

△▼△▼△▼△

Steadily, clearing away the colorless dust enshrouding the aisle with his hand, Batenkaitos stepped forth.

With an elegant gait brimming with graceful conduct, to not cause any noise greater than necessary was the etiquette of a maid, and the minimum consideration in order to not bring shame to one’s master.

Ahead of the smoke was supposed to be his beloved elder sister, collapsed.

He had wished to see, her various expressions. Conceiving potent emotions, her light-crimson eyes set ablaze, he had wished to directly gaze back into them.

That was a resolute initial desire, which could now be perceived as awakening of love.

Ley: “Oh dear.”

Patrasche: “——Dodogyuuun!!”

Beyond the dust, what was first in his sight was the black ground dragon dragging its feet.

During his chat and contact with nee-sama, before one could notice, the ground dragon had gone out of vision. Though not particularly a subject of his interest, he did have a task to fulfill regarding the existence brought along by the ground dragon.

He wished to erase that existence, which unpreparedly lured nee-sama’s mind.

His self being the only one to refer to nee-sama as nee-sama and yearn for her, was sufficient. Nee-sama belonged to his self alone.

Ley: “Ah, there it is.”

On the opposite side of the ground dragon twisting its build, there lay the form of the Sleeping Beauty drooping by the wall.

With the body raised just ideally, it would be easy to aim for the throat to the heart. Immediately bringing an end to that lifetime, he must commence with the main dish that was nee-sama.

And so, as he closed the distance to the Sleeping Beauty, Batenkaitos took notice.

——That the head of the young girl with eyes cast downward, crowned with blue hair, was dimly and fleetingly glowing.

For naught but a moment, he was puzzled regarding the identity of that glow.

However, saying that was not possible, he repudiated the answer arising from one’s own cognizance.

The possibility of the slumbering young girl performing that was——

???: “Making a correction.”

Ley: “——Hk, nee-sa…”

???: “Ram thought she did not possess the serendipity of time—— However, that was wrong.”

He attempted to call to the owner of the voice he had heard, but was unable to succeed.

A strike with velocity exceeding that, knocked Batenkaitos’s face. Astonishment, and in the subsequent instant a shockwave pierced through him, pushing him towards the opposite direction in the aisle he had trodden.

Ley: “——Hk!?”

Unable to kill off the vigor of the excessive might, Batenkaitos crashed through two walls, and came to a halt.

Stupefaction preceded agony or anguish; he immediately stood up, then knelt upon the weight of the damage. A profound blow as if he had been shattered to his body’s very core.

Wondering just what had happened, Batenkaitos made an astonished expression upon his lovely, amiable face——

Ram: “It rather seems, that even the heavens are head over heels in love with Ram and Rem’s cuteness.”

Dust enveloped the hole in the wall she had shattered through, and an instant after he tried to concentrate his vision in that direction, his face was seized by her palm with velocity that left even sound behind.

And, from a close proximity, he gazed at the opponent possessing a tight grip of his cheeks and jaw——

Ley: “Nee, sama…”

Ram: “Unfortunately, Ram’s little sister is asleep in the interior. Ram knows with clarity, due to Synesthesia.”

Ley: “*Sines, te*[296]*…?*”

[296] A slight mispronounciation, because the term for Synesthesia is usually written in Kanji (共感覚), yet Ley is voicing it in Hiragana (きょうかんかく). Or trying to, at least.

「ねえ、さま……」
「残念だけど、ラムの妹は奥で寝ているわ。『共感覚』ではっきりとわかる」
「きょう、かん……？」
「『共感覚』よ。ラムとレムは仲良し姉妹だったようね。喜びや怒り、悲しみや痛み、そういったものを分かち合える。――角の活性化の恩恵と負担、その両方も」

Ram: “It is Synesthesia. Ram and Rem were good sisters, wasn’t it so? Delight or rage, sadness or pain, things like those could be shared amongst—— The reactivation of a broken horn, and its recoil as well.”

He did not distinctly understand, what meaning it held.

Merely, what Batenkaitos had witnessed with these eyes, had been affirmed.

Before being knocked off his feet, what he had observed on the forehead of the Sleeping Beauty leaning on the wall, was a white horn—— the singular asset preponderating her elder sister, that the Oni girl possessed by birth.

Because that existed, because that glowed, because that communicated, what purport would it hold?

Ram: “Though Barusu’s plan being a hint is an annoyance, it is fine.”

Ley: “What did, Subaru-kun…”

Ram: “——Kindly stop saying Barusu’s name, with that face and that voice.”

Ley: “——Hk!!”

That moment, with his grasped face and body lifted upwards, Batenkaitos was slammed into the ground with vigor.

In nervousness, Batenkaitos swung his limbs. Ram opened and closed her fist, a gesture of seeming affirmation, whilst shedding immense quantities of blood from the scar on her forehead.

However, rather than perceiving the cascade of blood as irksome, she loosened her lips in its reception.

As though this blood and pain, proved the linkage of a vanished bond.

Ram: “Those born in a space of dark, are to kindly return to the space of dark. If you took birth in company of cries, then take company of cries and kindly die.”

Wiping off the blood on her forehead with her palm, eyes of light-crimson looked down upon Batenkaitos.

Batenkaitos had assembled the plethora of everything until now, wishing for violent emotion to dwell within those eyes.

——Upon that Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Ram looked down with eyes freezing cold.

Ram: “The reincarnation of the Oni God. Though Ram never liked it, Ram shall enact it just for today—— Ram’s adorable little sister’s counterfeit, this time for sure, you shall be ripped to shreds.”

Arc 6 Chapter 84 – Heave-ho! Heave-ho!

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 8 "——I Ask Thy Will", Parts 1-3

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Stabilizing an "*imaje*[297]" was essential in constructing ice in accordance with imagination.

Back when Subaru had initially proposed Ice Brand Arts to her as well, she had considered it to be incredibly handy, but Emilia remained insecure on whether she would be able to pull it off.

Subaru: "It's alright! No need to worry! Emilia-tan will surely be able to do it!"

So ascertained Subaru to an uncertain Emilia with his thumb raised, she recalled.

Now that she thought of it, that too had been completely unfounded—— no, Emilia believed Subaru had supported her back with his reason being "Because I like you".

In the course of creating weapons she "*imajed*[298]", Emilia had gone on to study illustrating arts aplenty.

Unlike songs, studying illustration was not a specialty of hers, yet, by drawing time and time again with Subaru, she was met by definite improvement.

From the sidelines during her studies, as they watched Emilia draw with Subaru and Beatrice, Ram would be amazed, Otto would smile wryly, Frederica and Petra would occasionally join in, and Garfiel would advise her on what would be better. Roswaal too, would observe Emilia and Beatrice drawing from a distance every so often.

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[297] A bit of a detail, but the word "image" here is an English loanword, but instead of being written in Katakana as is usual (イメージ), it is written in Hiragana (いめーじ) as to imply some unfamiliarity, or wrong pronunciation, by the speaker or the person whose point-of-view is being exposed in narration. Hence the intentional typo.

[298] Same as above.

For Emilia, these were reminiscences tremendously, immensely valuable, exigent to part ways from.

Reminiscences which had disappeared for everyone, but were remembered by Subaru. Upon the advent of that thought, a warm emotion surged deep within her chest.

Emilia: “I’ll turn that into courage with a hiyah——!”

With those surging emotions as a driving force, accompanied by the weapons of ice she had produced and the seven soldiers of ice which advanced alongside her, Emilia tackled the Divine Dragon Volcanica before herself.

As per the aforementioned explanation, the “*imaje*” was essential in the shaping of ice. Naturally that was the case with weapons, but also with the soldiers of ice brought forth. In other words, the soldiers of ice had been configured to a shape easy for Emilia to “*imaje*”.

To summarize, fighting alongside Emilia were seven of Natsuki Subaru.

Emilia: “But, they’re more powerful and quick than the real Subaru, so!”

Though Subaru would not lose in naughtiness and frolicsomeness either, his structure differed from that of the soldiers created with ice as their very foundation.

The soldiers’ strength depended on the density of the Mana bestowed upon them by Emilia, and could not be compared to simple sculptures of ice. They were the same as weapons of ice, able to hold their own against steel.

Emilia: “Go!”

Abiding by Emilia’s command, the ice warrior at the forefront plunged into Volcanica’s range.

Volcanica did not move, remaining reclined on the colossal pillar at the center of the First Floor of the Watchtower, the range of its earlier tail whip being four to seven meters.

That instant, as if it had detected the will to cling onto the pillar, the azure dragon swung its tail with great velocity.

Making an eccentric sound which could only be described as a hole gaping open in the air, the following moment, the upper body of the ice warrior in the vanguard got smashed to smithereens. Having taken a direct hit to the chest area, the trunk of the ice warrior shattered into two at that spot, as its head, taking after Subaru and the sharp look of his eyes, was blown off.

Emilia: "Sorry! But you would've been aimed for regardless of my presence!"

While apologetic towards the frost soldier used as a litmus test, she now understood what exactly was Volcanica's aim.

Though the Divine Dragon had become senile, had blanked out about the Examination as well, the will to intercept all opponents distinctly aiming for the pillar yet remained alive within it.

Regardless of the existence or nonexistence of said opponents' life. Henceforth, she wielded a course of action.

Emilia: "Soldier-sans, please!"

In concert with Emilia's voice, the ice warriors rushed forth, overtaking the silver-haired young girl.

The first one had been smashed to smithereens, leaving six ice warriors, each of them scattering in separate directions, headed towards the central pillar whilst creating a faint time lag.

Volcanica: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

Sensing the presences of the approaching ice warriors, the Divine Dragon repeated its vocal message yet again.

Seeing it relay that which was naught but an enumeration of words now devoid of meaning, to dolls possessing no ears to hear with, made Emilia feel potent desolation, and a heart-wrenching sense of misery.

Despite having been turned to this shape, Volcanica was trying to protect "something".

Though she did not know with whom, with what, and for what purpose had it exchanged that promise——

Volcanica: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

Within the blink of an eye, two of the ice warriors armed with weapons were shattered with a swing of the tail.

Though each had taken a defensive stance as an instantaneous response, one had everything below its waist blasted off, the other had its right half of its body subjected to the same, as they crumbled, unable to make any decent movement.

Hence, the remaining four headed for the tail returning to its original position from the attacking stance as to keep it in check.

In the present moment, Volcanica's means to counterattack were restricted to single swipes of its tail. It was possible that it not only had become senile, but its legs and loins had become weaker and unsteady as well.

If it was in a state in which simply standing up was arduous for it, then pinning down that tail would be sufficient.

Emilia: "Brace yourselves!"

With the aim of immobilizing the tail, three ice warriors joined their arms together, standing side-by-side.

Attempting to mow down those ice warriors all at once, yet again the tail of the Divine Dragon deserted sound behind. Though similar to the whip Subaru used in arrangement, its pace and might was in an entirely different league.

Had it been Subaru's whip then Emilia would be capable of catching it bare-handed, but that would be impossible for the Dragon's tail whip.

With potency which would take any ordinary living being their entire might, the Divine Dragon hurled it with listlessness akin to brushing away insects.

The impact brought forth by that tail once again struck the three ice warriors lined up side-by-side with lowered waists. However, the intense sound of shattering, which was supposed to have echoed, did not resound here.

For she had generated a wall of ice behind the three ice warriors with lowered waists, which supported them.

Should she know the strike was coming, she would have countermeasures prepared.

Despite the entirety of their bodies developing cracks, the ice warriors, taking after the young boy with a sharp expression of eyes, raised the edges of their mouths. And from the rear of the three who had halted the impact, the remaining final one jumped ahead, having been charged with a separate role.

What the final ice warrior wielded was a weapon known as a *sasumata*.

On the spearhead of the handle, similar to a long arrow, a curve-shaped fitting with the purpose of not stabbing but subduing the opponent was fixed, seemingly called so for its usage as a catcher[299].

Using that *sasumata* to thrust it down, it pinned the Divine Dragon's ill-mannered tail down onto the floor.

The Dragon's tail had ceased its movement; even its utmost slim end of the tail was bulky like a log, impossible of being held back by simply one *sasumata*. Hence the cracked three, one after the other, tackled it with their own *sasumata* as well.

And, four convenient points were arrested by the multiple *sasumata*, and even the Divine Dragon had its tail blocked——

Volcanica: *"——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."*

The subsequent instant, with a sound of the world being splintered, the bodies of the four ice warriors were gouged in their entirety.

[299] The *sasumata* is a weapon rooted in feudal Japan, utilized by samurai. Although the description here already describes it pretty well, see here for more information.

Everything upwards of their hips had vanished cleanly, and with only their lower bodies left, the ice warriors crumbled. The one responsible was not the tail having gotten serious after being immobilized—— but rather claws.

Lying on the floor, Volcanica used its left frontal limb in place of its tail.

By merely that, Emilia's soldiers of ice had been extinguished with certainty and without escape.

She had narrowly escaped being tricked into believing it had become infirm.

Emilia: "If both the limbs and the tail are doing well… Geez! Why is it that only the important thing, the brain, is blank!?"

Volcanica: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

Emilia: "I get that already, geez——!"

Repetition which would have driven anyone into further frenzy. Except for Emilia.

Despite having to hear it, Emilia's resolved spirit of challenge would not shatter. What could be shattered were only the soldiers of ice, though naturally, that did slightly hurt her heart.

Emilia: "It's alright! It's not as if I didn't get to know anything."

Asserting that the death of the shattered ice warriors had not been in vain, Emilia too headed towards the tail's range.

However, the many *sasumata* of ice suppressing the tail still stood strong, rendering the sacrifice of the four ice soldiers worthwhile. Thus naturally, claws would now aim for Emilia instead of the tail, but——

Emilia: "The reach of both your hands shorter than the tail, yes? And also…"

Before those claws could seize Emilia, ice spears passed by Emilia and drew near the Divine Dragon.

They had been hurled by ice warriors brought forth once again in Emilia's rear, at their original positions—— the maximum number of ice warriors Emilia could create was seven, but it was possible for them to be recreated whenever they got shattered.

In other words, the ice warriors could stand up again however many times until Emilia exhausted her strength.

Just like the real Natsuki Subaru.

Volcanica: *"——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."*

Emilia: "Kyaaa!?"

Upon the incessant downpour of ice spears outside of their range, Volcanica slammed its forelimbs right in front of itself.

That singular strike seemed as if it were rending space, producing a shockwave that appeared to leave an eternal mark of its claws, swallowing the entirety of the First Floor including Emilia and the ice warriors.

Emilia: "————"

Whilst halting the impact on her body brought by the shockwave, Emilia strained her amethyst-colored eyes.

The central pillar Volcanica was protecting, its firmness was solid, and she had not been able to carefully observe the pillar yet either. From a distant view it appeared to be no different from the other five pillars, but that judgement too was premature.

However, what Emilia sought utmost here, instead of the central pillar itself, was——

Emilia: "——Located on its top, the Tower's summit!!"

Undauntedly stepping into the gale, Emilia kicked the floor with might on that very spot.

She was yet too distant to take any action regarding Volcanica or the pillar. However, stepping ahead here, was the correct answer.

For an ice warrior, restored from its initially shattered state, lowered its waists and prepared its hands.

And, supporting Emilia's feet as she stepped ahead with both its hands, it assisted her into a leap towards greater height at once.

Having pinned down the tail, directing its attention to the pillar, she used that interval and headed towards the uppermost stratum which she sought the utmost.

Though a combination Emilia would not make reckless employ of, Emilia's intuition had told her the summit of the Tower was what she had to reach, having come this far.

The great leap which had borrowed an ice warrior's assistance, using it to jump above Volcanica's head in one go, she made for the topmost surface of the pillar. Should she simple ascend to the uppermost stratum from there——

Emilia: "——Huh?"

The following instant, as Emilia attempted to make her fingers reach the pillar, a tranquil heat wave grazed her feet.

——No, it was not tranquil. Sound had simply died at the hands of its exceeding might and heat. If it had killed the very concept of sound, it would be no enigma for it to have converted to a soundless phenomenon.

Emilia's perception had perceived the extinguishment of the ice warriors deployed across the First Floor.

The one which had lent its hands to aid Emilia's jump, the four which had thrown ice spears in support, the two which had sprinted for supplementing *sasumatas*, disappeared at the same second.

And what accomplished this, had been neither Volcanica's tail nor its forelimbs.

Volcanica: *"——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."*

Indeed, the death wail of air being scorched could be heard from its mouth, which had never parted with its majesty.

With the arrival of another one of its reiterations into her ears as a start, Emilia comprehended the resuscitation of the killed concept of sound, while at the same time, her fingers reached for the surface of the top of the pillar.

Somehow desperately fixing her body, Emilia looked down below.

There spreading wide was the First Floor, charred white.

White fumes akin to smolders rose from multiple spots, with not even the wreckage of the ice warriors which had supposedly existed left behind. Such heat, such might, such annihilation——

——The breath of the Divine Dragon Volcanica, had burnt all to naught.

Emilia: “Both the tail and the legs are doing well, and it can even spit fire, and yet!”

Volcanica: “——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner.”

Emilia: “I get it! I get it already! I really do get… Oh.”

Responding with a lack of grievousness taking into account the events that had occurred, Emilia widened her eyes midway through.

Steadily, the eyes of the Divine Dragon aimed upwards, the yellow eyeballs reflecting Emilia within themselves. And——

Volcanica: “——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit.”

Whilst pronouncing so, Volcanica unfolded both of its blue wings, and stood up at its position.

△▼△▼△▼△

Emilia: “Big trouble—— Hk.”

Comprehending the hazard of the events occurring below, Emilia extended her hand towards the topmost surface of the Tower in great panic.

In the interlude she was preoccupied with that, Volcanica deracinated its tail being restrained by the *sasumatas*, and sought to slowly flap its wings.

It intended flight.

It was, after all, the Divine Dragon Volcanica. Flying for it would be a matter of course—— but since Emilia had never seen a flying dragon, her sense of reality had been puny.

First of all, would a creature with a body so gigantic truly be able to soar in the skies?

Emilia: “I’ve only ever seen Puck and Roswaal fly too…”

It was ineluctable that Puck, a Spirit, and Roswaal, an eccentric magician, would fly.

From what she had heard, in the Vollachian Empire to the south, there existed flying dragons named winged dragons[300] that were similar to ground dragons or water dragon. Possibly, Volcanica was also considered a winged dragon.

Or perhaps, to categorize dragon and Dragon as the same might be an err in itself——[301]

Emilia: “Heave-ho! Heave-ho! Hiyah! Shah!”

Letting out an enthusiastic cry, Emilia clambered towards the Tower’s top at her greatest possible speed.

[300] This description here is a bit weird, because before, we had flying dragons be named “飛竜”, rather than the “飛ぶ龍” employed here, which uses the character for big boy Dragons such as Volcanica (as per the earlier translation note), or even “翼竜” also used here, translated as “winged dragon(s)”. And most confusingly of all, the use of “飛ぶ龍” isn’t even to describe Volcanica…

[301] This sounds stupid yes, but do take in mind the earlier translation note on how ground/water/flying dragons and (true) Dragons have different Kanji writings in Japanese (竜 vs 龍, respectively).

Though from a distant view her speed was jaw-droppingly astonishing, even if Emilia were to make fortunate effort beyond common sense, she lacked one card to be able to desert everything behind and dash on ahead.

Volcanica: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

She had not been hallucinating, in hearing that voice from a distance closer than before.

Because she had not managed to leave everything below her behind, the pronouncement had ascended to the same altitude as hers.

——Unfolding both of its azure wings, an unbelievably humongous frame fluttered midair.

Majestic and dignified, the Divine Dragon Volcanica soared to the skies of the Sand Dunes, the pressure of its presence ignorant to its decline.

The air of intimidation it emitted, or the glint in its eye glaring the impotent opponent, its tail or its forelimbs, even its breath, none of it turned traitor to it being a hyper-rank Dragon chronicled in legends.

However, the singularity which did turn traitor to that——

Emilia: "I! Intend to go above the First Floor, so I may not be your enemy!"

Volcanica: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

Poured with a voice conveying it possessed no ears to hear from, as Emilia clung to the pillar, Volcanica's menace resumed pursuit of her.

Inhaling, Emilia gritted her molars and borrowed the power of a "foothold which did not exist" there, and jumped over the tail whip.

Emilia: "Yahoo!!"

Practical usage of Ice Brand Arts—— rather than clambering up that pillar, she had installed footholds at its flanks, accelerating her speed by jumping above them.

Emilia: “Would the limbs become free too… Kyah!”

The instantaneously drawn twin swords of ice energetically repelled the slamming tail away.

A strike swung whilst relying on guesswork, and due to its vigor, both of Emilia’s arms, from her wrists to her elbows, went numb, rendering her seemingly unable to wield another novel weapon for the multiple seconds it would take her to stand up.

However, in contrast to the damage taken by Emilia, Volcanica had simply swung its tail.

Despite its transiency, the Divine Dragon resumed the same conduct as before, swinging its tail towards the challenger, its endeavor being to knock down—— no, to crush the opponent seeking to capture the pillar.

Emilia: “——Hk.”

Emilia’s breath hitched, in response to that approaching tail.

Should she be repelled once, she did not perceive she would have enough stamina left to reach the pillar once again. Should she suffer a direct hit from the tail notched with scales, she would surely be left in a terrible state.

She could not let that tail’s attack connect.

Emilia: “I can still… work, reaaally hard!!”

She could not use her arms. However, she could move her legs. She could aim for the top.

Though she had created footholds in order to aim for the top, that would not be sufficient. There was a limit to the number of ice ploys she could generate at once. She could not let that labor go to waste.

Fulfilling the purpose of the footholds, she would then be met by that which was endless——

Emilia: “——I got it!”

Volcanica: “——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner.”

Yet another tail whip drew near Emilia, to whom a great idea had just occurred.

Emilia somehow evaded it by borrowing the ordinary power of the footholds. And, bringing forth the new foothold she had thought of towards the pillar, she ingeniously grasped that hand by extending her own.

Emilia: “Please, soldier-san!”

Responding to that voice of Emilia’s, the one to creak its arms constructed of ice was an ice warrior taking after Subaru, having been generated yet again after being burnt to annihilation—— but, merely its upper body.

Not simply a foothold, but an existence which functioned as both a foothold as well as a reliable ally of Emilia’s—— a “path of ice soldiers”, with simply their upper bodies, grew out of the pillar one after the other.

Since they simply had their upper bodies growing out of the pillar and she did not have to create their legs, she could also raise their number to greater than seven.

Making around ten of them grow out of the pillar at once, Emilia borrowed their hands, and headed upwards, headed upwards.

Emilia: “Hiyah! Yah! Shiyah! Alright!”

Borrowing the hands of the upper bodies of ice growing out of the pillar in a literal sense, Emilia climbed towards the topmost surface of the pillar.

Meanwhile, Volcanica did attempt to obstruct Emilia, but the men on the pillar hindered it from the side.

Adhering to its trait of protecting the pillar, Volcanica was unable to leave the ice warriors on that pillar.

The generated ice warriors hurled swords and axes of ice towards Volcanica, and as the Divine Dragon repelled them, it hunted the ice warriors on the pillar one-by-one by use of its tail or forelimbs.

Although, whilst Emilia headed for the pillar’s top, its top, its top——

Emilia: “Though this spot, is a bit tough!”

To have overcome the hazard, would be somewhat too lively an impression, but with the ice soldiers' strength and sacrifice as the foundation stone, Emilia's hands had finally reached for the topmost surface of the pillar.

Though she would reach the uppermost stratum of the Tower in around ten more meters, the topmost surface of the pillar had a curve akin to that of a rat guard[302], so climbing hereon would be a deed of utmost difficulty.

Though the situation was one wherein even people who specialized in mountain climbing would be troubled, fortunately, Emilia specialized in tree climbing. In the past, her zeal for it had led her to be scolded by Fortuna and Archi.

Emilia: "The numbness of my fingers is also alright, now I can…!"

Regaining sensation in her numb fingers, Emilia tackled the bent, unkind pillar.

Grasping the hand of the ice warrior growing upside-down on the slant, she drifted her legs midair towards the unstable skies. But thanks to the ice warrior's assistance, her climb was steady.

What remained, was only for Volcanica's obstruction to be——

Emilia: "——Hk."

That moment, her mind became unfocused for a beat, and a twist of fate occurred intrusively.

Volcanica: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

The potent jolts that broke out, were caused by a severe strike into the pillar by Volcanica's tail, as it articulated so. It transmitted the impact through the entirety of the pillar, thoroughly fissuring the ice warriors that had solely their upper bodies growing out of that pillar, shattering them at once.

And, the ice warrior lending its hand to Emilia on the slant was no exception.

[302] A rat guard is a simple disc that is used on the mooring lines of a boat to stop rats from travelling across the ropes onto the boat, and vice-versa. So basically picture this as the pillar curving outwards, making it so one would have to climb upside down.

Emilia: "——Ah."

The hand she had grasped shattered starting at the shoulder, and Emilia's body fell, having lost its support. The ice warrior donning mean-looking eyes attempted to halt her, but neither of its hands could reach anymore.

Instantly, a feeling of suspension enveloped the entirety of Emilia's body, putting Emilia's risky climb of the pillar to waste, invalidating it all and placing her back onto the First Floor—— that was not what occurred.

Emilia: "Kyaaa!"

Emilia had been supposed to fall down multiple tens of meters, the height of the pillar she had attempted to clamber. Emilia inhaled upon that premonition, however, something caught Emilia's bottom unexpectedly quickly.

Not an ice warrior. From her instinct, all of the ice warriors growing from the pillar had all been shattered.

Furthermore, her hands were immediately touching something rugged and rigid——

Emilia: "Could it be…"

Volcanica: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

A voice reached her from close proximity, as Emilia confirmed the winds of high heights and the sensation below her hips.

Due to the nearness of that voice, Emilia made a delayed realization—— That she, had fallen on top of the Divine Dragon Volcanica's back.

Emilia: "——Hk! Stay focused! From here, I may be able to…"

Be able to use Volcanica as a foothold and reach the pillar once again.

So planned Emilia, but the distress of being unable to execute that with ease descended upon her.

Flapping its wings, Volcanica ascended and twisted its body, intending to throw her off.

Emilia: “——Ugh, ughhhhhh!”

Enduring the mighty, powerful wind assailing upon her body, Emilia desperately clung to the dragon’s spine.

Physical wind Emilia had never felt until now—— what she was clinging to were scales, every single one of them colossal with tenacity akin to that of rocks, and she would not be able to persist for long should things remain this way.

Furthermore, Volcanica was merely flying in the sky with freedom.

She was not basking in a tail whip, hammer arm, much less its dragon breath.

It was merely flying with vigor, seeking to make the clinging Emilia fall.

Should she lose to this, it would be far too——

Emilia: “——I wouldn’t be able to look Subaru and everyone else in the eye any more.”

Should she heedlessly open her mouth, her lungs could possibly be exploded from the wind rushing inside.

Her eyes cast downwards, her molars gritted tightly, Emilia thought back to the people she cherished beyond her eyelids.

It was like she was prepared to die, but that was not the case.

The purpose of Emilia thinking of the people she cherished, was so that she could face forward.

For her to be given a push on her back, and to gain the courage to look ahead.

Emilia: “————”

Even while being swallowed by tremendous winds, Emilia forced her eyelids to open.

Her circumstances were such that she had to pour the entirety of her strength or she would be unable to even open her eyelids. In its midst, without losing the strength of her amethyst eyes, Emilia dared to open her eyes to discover a means to survive.

Humans were beings who would end up closing their eyes in times of being crushed by fright and insecurity.

But, the people whom Emilia cherished, depicted behind her eyelids, faced forward in precisely such times. They were people who did not close their eyes in times precisely as those.

She must have her eyes remain open.

In order to reach for something, in order to hold someone's hand, and——

Emilia: "——That's strange."

In every place, above and below, left and right, everywhere, the spectacle was dominated by azure.

Though Emilia being in skies even above clouds was also a reason, it was also because the Divine Dragon Emilia was clinging to was clad in brilliant azure scales.

Since everything aside from that quickly passed by due to their exceedingly high speed, even Emilia's perception of moving bodies, which could discern even the path of a thrown ball like a seam, could not capture the world within itself.

Thus, what Emilia's awareness had captured was not the world aside from what was azure.

Volcanica: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

While twisting, turning its body, Volcanica soared.

It seemed the area Emilia was clinging to was around the base of Volcanica's wings. Enigmatically, the Dragon did not move its wings with that much engagement. Though it was necessary for birds and insects to flutter their wings for flight, the principle of the Dragon's flight appeared to be different.

It was surely closer to Puck or Roswaal's mechanism for flying. If so——

Emilia: “Roswaal used magic… Puck too, used a mysterious power so.”

Unfortunately, never had she tried this with Roswaal, nor did she intend to.

However, for an extensive duration, Emilia had lived and spent time together with her family whom she thought comprised of solely one.

For this singular year, they had been separated, and there had been multiple instances of her feeling incredibly lonely. Sometimes she nearly cried at night, but reminiscences provided support through it.

And the voice present within those reminiscences, showed hope to Emilia in this pressing time. That was——

Emilia: “I’m just guessing here, but could it be that you also don’t like to have your neck tickled?”

The amethyst eyes opened with force, captured the long neck of the Divine Dragon twisting its frame. Below that great draconic jaw, amidst the uniform blue scales was a sole white scale.

——The days of frolicking about with Puck dawned onto Emilia’s mind.

???: “Stop it~, Lia. If you do it so softly then my concentration will get disturbed, you know?”

Emilia: “——Isn’t that right, Puck.”

Accompanied with the responding voice, Emilia concentrated her consciousness.

Amidst this mighty wind, Emilia did not possess the strength to directly reach that white scale. However, what she had learnt by the pillar, could be resuscitated even should the other party change from an inorganic to an organic substance.

Emilia: “——Soldier-san.”

Ahead of Emilia’s cognizance, the soldiers of ice once again appeared around the white scale.

Ice soldiers which were solidly supporting each other with merely their upper bodies, and one that was born in their core steadily extended its hand towards the white scale——

Volcanica: “————Haaahraaan!?”

——For the first time, Emilia heard a voice apart from the Divine Dragon's repetitions.

△▼△▼△▼△

——Reverse scale, there existed a phrase so.

This phrase, originating from ancient Chinese traditions, spoke of the mythological being dubbed Dragons, each possessing a singular scale which ought not be touched on their neck, called a "reverse scale".

A dragon whose reverse scale were to be touched would become enraged, and with certainty would kill the other person.

Originating from that custom, to touch a part of the opponent which ought not be touched came to be expressed with the phrase "touching the reverse scale"[303].

Of course, Emilia possessed no reason to be aware of such origins of historic phrases from another world.

She sought to touch the white scale on the dragon's neck in order to muddle the concentration of the opponent, who was vigorously flying about attempting to make her fall, and buy an interval of time. However——

Emilia: "KYAAAAAAA!!"

Screaming as she was hurled into the air, Emilia witnessed the earth and the heavens revolve round and round for her.

However, her suspension midair lasted even shorter this time compared to when she had landed on the dragon's spine earlier. Caught by a solid sensation, Emilia instantly protected herself, and tumbled.

And, nimbly standing up at that spot, she remained cautious regarding her environs.

[303] Funnily enough, the expression translated literally here, "逆鱗に触れる", also has an archaic nuance of "displeasing the Emperor". Which is somewhat ironic in this context, given how Volcanica is pretty much the most important figure in the Kingdom of Lugunica, supplanting even the Royal Candidates.

Emilia: "————"

Breathing hoarsely, Emilia glanced around her environs.

Fortunately, there were no hints of an abrupt attack assailing down upon Emilia. That too was a matter of course. At present, Volcanica, the subject of her utmost vigilance, was far, far above.

Volcanica: *"——Haahraan!!"*

As if extraordinarily revolted by its white scale having been touched, Volcanica agonized as it ascended to higher skies.

With the echo of a wail ostensibly crunching the sky, Emilia involuntarily rounded her eyes.

Emilia: "Puck used to enjoy it, though…"

Regardless, it was up to each person to enjoy it or to not enjoy it.

Admonishing herself to not become too pushy, Emilia confirmed the sensation in her limbs.

Having been tremendously swung about by Volcanica, the blood flow of her body had become slightly disarrayed.

Depending on the situation, hindrances in one's blood flow resulted in the phenomena of losing vision due to lack of blood flow into the brain, but Emilia had managed to barely hold out.

And, with that affirmation, Emilia took notice.

Emilia: "——Ah! This place is…"

Upon looking around, Emilia's field of vision was a stratum above, compared with the time she had arrived at the First Floor.

The absence of the six pillars supposed to be in her environs was proof of her having arrived at an altitude above their apex—— to name, precisely this place was the uppermost stratum.

She had reached it, in the form of getting dropped off Volcanica's back.

The uppermost stratum of Pleiades Watchtower, an untrodden territory, at last——

Emilia: “Woo, I did it! Working hard and persevering paid off!”

With a modest reaction to the emotionally moving happenings, Emilia put her hand on her chest, and made haste towards the center of the uppermost stratum immediately.

Should she act nonchalantly, the agonizing Volcanica may return.

Before that came to pass, she had to discover the Examination as to save Subaru and the rest.

Emilia: “Please, give me a problem that even I know the answer to…”

Though Volcanica, having forgotten the Examination, was a problem as well, what was another problem for Emilia was whether she would even be able solve the Examination of the First Floor in the first place.

Bearing that fear, Emilia headed towards the center of the uppermost stratum. And, arriving at the base of a pillar extending to the heavens there, Emilia said “Ah” and widened her eyes.

There it was. A peculiarity not possessed by the six pillars in the floor below.

There certainly it was, the enigmatic peculiarity possessed solely by the pillar in the center, of this uppermost stratum. It was——

Emilia: “——Someone’s, handprints?”

At the uppermost stratum of Pleiades Watchtower, at the base of the pillar in its center, was a black Monolith.

And on that black Monolith, were handprints.

——Six handprints of respective differing men and women, had been printed.

Arc 6 Chapter 85 – Good Loser[304]

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 6 “Good Loser”, Parts 2-6

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——The Finest of Knights, to name himself so, entailed courage.

He indeed took pride in being called so, extolled so by others.

However, never had there been even a single instance wherein he had labelled himself as the “utmost”, or “fine”[305].

He possessed conceit for having stockpiled unsparing hard work, for having diligently devoted himself to learning, every day.

However, in his incompetent and inexperienced history, he was naught but surrounded by unending excelling pioneers, comrades commanding respect, and juniors worthy of admiration.

Though vexing, he considered that to be bliss.

Being acknowledged by someone ought to be reward for strenuous efforts and diligence.

Much less, in the endeavor to be acknowledged by everyone, the strenuous efforts and diligence must be of such devotion that they would be regarded as extraordinary, that everybody would be amazed by solely those.

[304] Much like Chapter 29, titled “Loser” (ルーザー), this Chapter’s title is also written in Engrish (ルーザー), which would normally be an Engrish flip, to something like “負け犬” (loser) or “諦めの良い” (being a good loser), but neither of those really suit my fancy, plus this Chapter is an iconic one, so it’s best to leave it as-is.

[305] Julius’s nickname, “最優の騎士”, is composed of the Kanji “最”, meaning “utmost”, and “優”, translated here as “fine”.

——Had he truly worked hard enough to be worthy of that?

He possessed conceit for having stockpiled unsparing hard work, for having diligently devoted himself to learning, every day, with absolute certainty.

However, had he transcended his boundaries? Had he polished and refine himself every day until he had exhausted all of his strength? Inspired by the strenuous efforts of others, had he pledged further hard work to his ideals?

He would answer his own question, by himself.

Julius Juukulius, had indeed accomplished that.

Transcending boundaries, polishing and refining himself until he exhausted all of his strength, with inspiration from the strenuous efforts of others he pledged further hard work to his ideals.

——Hence, before the existence who stood as the pinnacle of the sword, he held his head high with confidence.

Julius: "——I am the Finest of Knights, Julius Juukulius. The sword of the Kingdom, that shall slash you down."

Reid: "————"

Grasping the hem of his mantle, Julius bowed, and ahead of him the Sword Saint stood in silence.

He closed his other eye, the one eye not concealed by the eye patch, and did not look at Julius. But, silently bracing his bulky, burly arms, he pondered about something.

However, his pondering did not last for long. By simply their short fellowship until now, it was clear that he was the one to possess the disposition of being utmost unsuited to ponderation. Thus——

Reid: "Ah, ah, ahhhh, AHHHHHHHHHH—— FUCKIN' HELL!!"

With an intense scratch of his head, the Sword Saint Reid potently stomped the floor once.

Upon that singular blow, the white floor of the Second Floor quaked as if fissuring. Though Echidna, who was watching over the confrontation of the two, drew her body back, Julius stood firm, unwavering.

Witnessing that, Reid clicked his tongue with a “Tch”.

Reid: “Appearances, appearances, appearances… Yeah, appearances, aye. Ya really do be speakin’ shit like my follower. What an insufferable bastard ya are, ya prick.”

Julius: “Though unfortunately I am not acquainted with him, I must offer my sympathies to the man whom you say is your follower.”

Reid: “Ahh? Who the hell said my follower’s a dude? Takin’ bastards ‘round ain’t gonna be amusin’ in the first place. The follower I’m talkin’ ‘bout’s a woman. She’s got a nice face, but damn’s her reasonin’ annoyin’.”

Julius: “A woman… Then, what is the similitude between myself and her which you speak of?”

Reid: “Ahh? Don’t’cha make me say it again and again.”

As wrinkles appeared on his snout, Reid expressed a ferocious smile akin to a shark.

And, unfastening the locked fold of his arms and knocking his cheeks with his hands,

Reid: “Stenchy reasonin’, and havin’ a good face.”

Julius: “————”

Reid: “Hell, so ya won’t even get annoyed. Damn uncute… Well, it‘s aight.”

Snorting his nose in response to Julius’s destitute reaction, Reid magnificently crackled the bones of his neck. Afterwards, through his blue eye, he observed Julius—— no, not merely Julius, but his environs too.

The quivering fleeting lights seemingly encircling Julius, their brilliance had strengthened compared to what it had been earlier.

Above all, this would be his first time making these girls debut in this way before Reid.

Julius: “My buds… No, my lovely maidens, do you perhaps have anything to object regarding them?”

Reid: “Hah, nothin’. Nice women ain’t of any regard to their race. Unfortunately, I ain’t interested in women I can’t sleep with—— Ya prick, ya’d’ve grown stronger had ya broken outta yer shell, y’know?”

Julius: “If you say so, then a path like that certainly may have existed.”

Something like offering advice to juniors, was fickleness unimaginable considering Reid’s personality.

For him to have done so, was certainly due to Reid’s own moodiness and him deeming Julius’s desperate form, who naught but clung to sword, to be a waste.

If you are going to cling to the sword anyways, then take a stance paying no heed to appearances—— That had been the attitude and resolve he had sought for Julius, and that too had been a realizable path. However——

Julius: “I, decided to walk this path. Or possibly, instead baring what is my true self, as you say, may make me stronger.”

Julius was aware that, should he himself not be plenty conscious of it, he would naturally become that way.

In a moment of an instant, in a narrow exchange of blows, should a solitary bit of his skin make the distinction between life and death, the face of the true Julius would reveal itself.

However, that spoke of a scenario wherein he would not be powerfully conscious of it—— No longer would he waver.

Julius: “Hereby I declare. I shall think of myself as a Knight thoroughly. Furthermore, instead of the path you tried to guide me to, I shall become my self who excels in all fronts.”

Reid: “Huh, the hell kinda reasonin’ makes ya say ya’re gonna be doin’ that, ya prick.”

Julius: “It is obvious—— The Knight I lay my trust in, is the personification of ideals. He is noble, just, and stronger than any other. Then, it is inevitable that I, who name myself as a Knight, must be that way as well.”

Reid: "——Ha."

Ludicrous reasoning per his own words, an illogical line of argument and claims, high-handed arbitrariness worthy of being a natural subject of ridicule.

However, upon hearing that, Reid did not perform an overt expression of his rage, , he simply displayed his sharp fangs and laughed, directing no disgust or disdain whatsoever. And——

Reid: "Gonna make ya cry."

Saying so, Reid tossed aside the chopstick he held, and, before a Julius gazing in wonder, took a great leap towards the rear. Subsequently, he steadily extended his hand towards the side.

What his huge palm was gripping to, was the stipulated sword planted into the white layer——

Originally, Reid Astrea was supposed to have merely lent his existence as the Examiner of the Watchtower.

For whatever reason, he detached the arrangement of the Tower through intense self-consciousness, and finally, by overwriting the flesh body of the raiding Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, had managed to fulfill a pseudo-resurrection.

In this condition, in this position whereby he did not need to abide by the Tower's Examination, only then did Reid draw out the stipulated sword for the first time, abiding by his original role. Namely——

Julius: "——Gain his forgiveness, by hand of the Fool who has reached the Heavenly Sword."

Reid: "That's my line y'know… Well, tho' I totally forgot 'bout it."

Julius: "I thought so, thus I stated it in your stead—— I challenge you."

Reid: "Like hell I'd give ya forgiveness, ya dunce. Gonna make ya cry ugly."

Before Julius, who had his Knight's sword braced in his front, Reid crudely pointed the sword he had drawn out.

No intervals, whatsoever. Assuming a relaxed stance, having reached the extremes, the ultimate swordsman——

——The pinnacle of all who wielded the sword, the Sword Saint Reid Astrea.

Julius: “And now——”

Reid: “However ya’d like.”

Julius: “——Ready yourself!!”

Placing faith in the chivalry shaping his self, Julius Juukulius tackled the Sword Saint with the entirety of his might.

△▼△▼△▼△

Both his body and heart, felt light.

In a non-figurative sense, that was the might of enhancement enveloping Julius, as he swung the Knight’s sword.

Needless to say, stability of mind had an immense influence in battle.

Upon consideration, to state Julius had been in an unstable condition ever since he had arrived at this Pleiades Watchtower—— no, ever since he had gotten his own Name plundered in the Watergate City, would be unerring.

Of course, Julius admonished and restrained his own self as much as possible, forbidding it from showing on his face.

Self-control anyone would appraise as akin to rationality of steel—— however, it was not something that had been praised.

Furthermore, forbidding the inferior form of his self from showing on his face, the consequence of having deceived his comrades and even his own self, had led to the unsightly defeat of successive, consecutive losses ever since their arrival at this Tower.

Julius ought to have placed his trust in others, to begin with.

Losing his presence of mind due to the impact of having his own existence forgotten, whilst merely pitying himself who had been displaced from worlds of others', he had failed to notice what he should have placed faith in the utmost.

Were the people whom Julius cherished, whom he trusted in, whom he had pledged his loyalty to, whom he had entrusted his back to, humans who would simply disregard Julius Juukulius, who had been displaced from their world without their notice?

——Absolutely not, he could assert so.

Hence, what Julius ought to have done had been simply one thing.

Appealing with sincerity, he should have indicated his affection by his volition—— The way he had done so, with his buds.

Julius: "I should have retied the severed bonds. One who is nobody, can become anybody… For nobody but I myself is living witness to that!"

The child of a commoner who was nobody, had become even the most attractive, the coolest Knight in this world.

Julius, who had become nobody, was supposed to have become somebody once again. And——

Julius: "No matter how many chances should I be given, I would surely still be charmed by the seemingly blazing young man that day, perceive ideals on the back of one who stood for the Knight, and challenge you, the pinnacle of the sword, after all——!"

Reid: "Blabberin' 'bout shit, damn cheeky of ya, ya prick!!"

Upon Julius's decapitating slash, who had his determination set on the tip of his sword, Reid bellowed whilst matching in with the same sword strikes.

As the entirety of his body lay subject to those sword moves and sword might, Julius straitened his yellow-hued eyes and felt wonder.

Restarts included, this would be the fourth time he was battling Reid in this manner.

The first challenge, and the immediately subsequent defeat. This time, with moreover the confinement of the narrowed Watchtower's entirety, and having successfully Contracted with his buds anew, was the fourth time.

Within all of this, Reid using a weapon aside from chopsticks—— though referring to chopsticks as a weapon had exceeding room for doubt, anyhow, him swinging something aside from chopsticks, this would be the first.

And in these moments, with the pinnacle of the sword, the Sword Saint having wholly gripped the sword, he thought.

Julius: "The power of your sword has not changed, compared to the time you were using chopsticks…!"

Reid: "Liiike I just said, damnit. The reason I'm strong ain't 'cause I swing the sword. The only reason I'm strong, is just 'cause I'm strong."

Defending against the sword strikes being casually swung down overhead, once his knees creaked, a pursuit aimed for him from directly below. Narrowly tiding over the attack he had borne witness to for the first time, Julius flew towards the rear upon the impact.

Reid trailed that, not by breaking into a pursuit, but by simply taking a few long steps.

Though one would grow to suspect his peculiar gait, there was nothing special about it.

By merely stepping forth upon the thought of catching up with an opponent who had drawn back, readily inventing and realizing a new form of gait unlike any of its previously existing schools, was simply Reid's ability.

Just as Reid himself had averred it, that was simply a matter of his norm transcending "existence".

Reid: "Do ya wanna cry now?"

Julius: "——No, the feeling of challenging a legend is livening up my chest!"

Rather than with a bravado, Julius responded with truthfulness whilst being impelled.

Indeed, that was true. The one before his eyes was Reid Astrea. Simply how many times had Julius's heart throbbed for him, his eyes twinkled for him, how many times had he admired him, yearned for him, due to his legend?

Meeting that person in reality, though he had been precisely astonished by his personality, his strength had been the very ideals he admired and yearned for.

Henceforth, simply how wasteful had his self been in what he engaged in?

All whilst possessing the opportunity to exchange words, exchange swords, exchange beliefs and conviction with him——

Julius: "Haa."

Whilst crossing swords with the "genuine article", Julius exhaled upon the arrival of an unforeseen thought.

Exceedingly out-of-place, however, the anticipation made his heart throb, truly delightful and piquant.

Reid: "The hell ya smilin' 'bout?"

Julius: "Nothing, a thought simply dawned on me—— Once I fulfill my objective here and return to the service of my master, that I shall challenge my friend, Reinhard."

Upon Reid's inquiry, Julius pronounced his idea.

Never even once had Julius competed against Reinhard in swordsmanship until the present. On the contrary, before it was determined that they would be in differing camps in the Royal Selection, the idea of vying with each other over anything at all had never occurred to him.

——He regretted never having attempted to gain an equal standing.

That too, had been one of the reasons why Julius served Anastasia, and took part in the Royal Selection.

However, even had he not possessed those sentiments, Julius still would have been enchanted by Anastasia's immense talent, would have wished to see the same dreams as her, would have stood at the same place as her.

Thus, from the very beginning, never had he been in need of dull excuses or roundabout stances.

From the very beginning, he simply should have taken two wooden swords and headed over to Reinhard.

Once in the past, Reinhard and the strongest swordsman of the Vollachian Empire had crossed swords.

That day, when everyone in the parade ground had possessed wild enthusiasm towards the atmosphere of the sword, Julius too felt warmth in his chest.

For that had been the answer——

Reid: “Ahhn, that’s a name I ain’t ever heard of. Who the hell’s this nobody?”

Julius: “He is your descendant. And, along with being the present Sword Saint, he is my friend.”

Reid: “Kakh! The kid of my kid, just an outsider by that point, goddamn. I ain’t gonna notice him even if I see him by some roadside.”

Intertwining sword moves and kicking moves, Reid elucidated his lack of connection whilst snorting his nose.

Finding faint refutation in that dissertation, Julius attempted to open his mouth whilst exchanging swords——

Reid: “I’m startin’ to get fed up of talkin’ ‘bout outsiders. Ya prick, do ya wanna have a damn chat with me?”

Julius: “——Though I will not deny that, I shall deny.”

Reid: “————”

Julius: “If only there were time, I would have liked to exchange words with you, let it be for two days or for three days. However, at present the time for that purpose, regrettably, does not exist. Telling me to make haste, my back is being pushed. Thus——”

With distance opened in between, Reid lifted his cheeks whilst viewing Julius. In Reid’s blue eye was Julius’s form, augmenting its luminosity.

The swirling six colored lights intermingled, gently commencing to paint an aurora, a rainbow. And——

Julius: "——Al Clauseria!!"

The radiance of the emitted rainbow, swept the white world as it headed towards Reid.

△▼△▼△▼△

Julius himself widened his eyes as well, upon the emitted aurora's span and might.

A magic already of extraordinary scope, transformed into the maximum of Spiritual Arts; it being treated the same as before now inviting discourtesy——

???: "————"

Buds—— no, he shall not refer to those girls, who had verbatim made their occluded gift and talent bloom, as buds.

Those girls, who had achieved growth capable of being perceived as sublime, with beauty, with charm, with heroism, with dignity, vividly, were not buds, but maidens.

To monopolize those girls entirely to himself, as all six of them exhibited their respective glamour, may have made him a sinner greater than the Sin Archbishops. However——

Julius: "Even if you all forget me, I love you all."

As though to catch up with the emitted aurora, Julius stepped forth.

The radiance of rainbow clad in six elements, broke through all shields and shattered the target. Hence, before the rainbow-colored light, the options left for the opponent were merely two—— to take up the gauntlet, or to evade.

Reid: "——Haa."

And in accordance with his personality, Reid Astrea would not dodge the radiance of rainbow.

Responding to the radiance of rainbow surging forward in front, Reid raised his burly arms and slashed down the sharp edge of the ordained sword he was gripping to.

With no reliance on special magic or Divine Protections, a “sword move” named as pure violence—— with a sole swing, it expunged the maximal magic Julius had fired with all his might.

However, that too had been factored in by Julius, as he paced ahead.

Vaulting ahead from behind the expunged aurora, Julius borrowed the strength of his sword, and his maidens.

Julius: “Ia! Aro!”

Upon that instant, the red and green Spirits responded to the call and unified their strength, the wind formed a whirlpool around the blazing flame, generating a tornado of incandescence at Reid’s feet.

Sensing the coil of the heat wave underneath, Reid nimbly escaped upwards before he was scorched.

However, the linkage of the Spirit Knight, of the Finest of Knights, commenced from hereon.

Julius: “Qua! Ik!”

The yellow Spirit yielded a protuberance on the clear floor, propelling Julius’s frame further upward. Simultaneously, the glow of the blue Spirit glaciated the moisture in the air, hindering Reid’s ascent, who had jumped upwards.

Clicking his tongue, Reid inverted his stance through an evidently beyond human deed of stomping the air, and stationed his legs onto the ceiling of ice generated midair, scowling at Julius whilst upside down.

Firm strength poured into Reid’s arm, and an interception aimed for the ascending Julius——

Julius: “In! Ness!”

In the juncture wherein the Sword Saint’s counterattack drew near him, the white and black Spirits intermeddled with the world with their respective powers.

The white light bestowed strength upon the entirety of Julius's build, the black light weakened the might of Julius's enemy however meagerly. The paltry differentiation born in those moments, was a central force in the outcome that followed immediately.

Reid: "————"

With the ice ceiling turned foothold shattering to fragments, Reid's hurled form blurred due to his velocity.

The artless stance of the ordained sword launched a sort of ultimate move, its verticality, horizontality, depth all unreadable—— sensing it not as a menace, Julius held his chest steady and confronted it.

The withstanding truth was that, upon the crossing of a sword slash and a sword slash, the stronger side would repel the other.

Thus, Julius opened his eyes—— The eyes which had continually, perpetually watched that which proceeded upwards, proceeded forwards.

Julius: "————"

Killing the very concept of sound and light, Reid's flash cleaved space.

He would affirm. Should it be the stipulated sword or the chopsticks, regardless, come what may in that flash's path, it would be slashed down.

For that was, the very manifestation of the notion of the "sword".

The "sword" was that which was brought forth for the purpose of slashing objects down.

And sword moves, was the term denoting the techniques for slashing objects down with that sword.

Henceforth, the flash which slashed down all objects in the world, was the culmination, and the long-cherished original desire, of the "sword" and of the "sword moves".

Those slashed by it, would not forget the truth of having been slashed down for eternity.

Thus, the scar Julius Juukulius sustained beneath his left eye, shall not fade away for eternity.

That was the indemnification for having dodged the Sword Saint's flash, from a distance near enough to graze past.

Julius: "————"

Renouncing his blocking stance, he perceived through the opponent's sword with momentary offense and defense.

The slashed fundus of his eye spouted blood. However, he would not close his eyes. Maintaining his focus on the opponent, he swung his arm.

Having renounced parrying it, he rained a hundred flashes in offense——

Julius: "——Al Clarista."

The greatest ever sword strike of Julius Juukulius painted the colors of a rainbow.

It captured the smile of Reid Astrea, ferocious like that of a shark——

——The eyepatch concealing the left eye of the Sword Saint, was pierced by the Knight's strike, and swayed into the air.

△▼△▼△▼△

Julius: "————"

The instant he descended upon the clear floor with his toes, he sensed the echo of footsteps to be frightfully blaring.

The moment he became conscious of that, Julius's heart, in the depths of his chest, having forgotten to beat, commenced movement in panic.

Subsequently turning towards the rear, he gazed at the burly spine facing towards him.

Reid: "————"

His long, red hair jolting, the back stood firm and still.

The great man gripped to the sword of selection in his right hand, and his left hand was positioned at his face. The spot which that left hand was touching was originally supposed to have an eyepatch present, but currently it was absent.

The eyepatch that concealed the left eye of the Sword Saint, at present, had fallen at Julius's feet.

Julius: "…So it connected, huh."

His voice quivered, as he looked down upon the eyepatch fallen on the clear floor, and the Knight's sword in his own hand.

Though his whisper sought to affirm the occurred happenings, it possessed an excessive lack of connection to reality. To him, this seemed as though a transient dream, that this all would slip away and vanish through his fingers. However——

Maidens: "————"

Through not the notion of words, the six lights extolled Julius's established achievement.

The warm flowers named his beloved, sought to fill the void born in Julius's heart.

And accompanying the commend of his blooming maidens——

"Anastasia": "——Julius."

Hearing the soft voice, Julius turned his gaze towards its direction.

The great man with his spine turned towards him, the maidens transmitting their commendations, and overlooking the battle from a locus disparate from either of them, having called to Julius, was a female with light-purple hair.

With a face identical to that of his cherished master, whom he had pledged to dedicate his sword to, the Artificial Spirit who would live on to eternity, with whom he had a relationship of unknowingly mutually wounding each other——

Whether the reason for her solicitude for Julius was because she cherished Anastasia, or due to the functioning of his Divine Protection of Gathering Spirits, the answer remained veiled.

However, the being of someone who watched over the resolution of Julius Juukulius eased his heart to such an extent, he thus hauled up his Knight's sword in gratitude.

Julius: "————"

Wordlessly, he hoisted his Knight's sword up towards the heavens.

Remnants embellished with the aurora glistened, the path of the sword verbatim delineated a rainbow.

That was surely, akin to blessings showered upon the Knight named Julius Juukulius——

Reid: "——Had this been the shitty bloody Examination, this would've made for your victory."

Articulating so, the great man languidly stomped his *zori* on the floor in a tangent.

Once he turned around, no wound lay visible on Reid's face. What the tip of Julius's sword had reached, had evidently been merely his eyepatch. However, neither was even Reid shameless enough to exaggerate so and say it did not reach him.

Above all, his prior remark had not been his unwillingness to admit defeat, but the truth.

Had this indeed been the continuance of the Examination of the Second Floor, Electra, of the Pleiades Watchtower, at the point of having a single blow connect successfully, Julius would have passed it and gained the right to challenge the upper stratum.

However, the battle between Julius and Reid was no longer a question of the Tower's Examinations.

They were battling in order to settle things between a sole Knight and a sole swordsman, between a man and a man.

Reid: "————"

Having lost his eyepatch, Reid, with both of his eyes open, gripped the stipulated sword with both of his hands.

Clutching the sword's grip, he took a stance with the sword aimed at the other's eyes—— indeed, the Sword Saint took a stance.

Took a stance not for artlessly swinging sticks, but in order to slash the enemy down, with certainty.

Reid: "Don't be complainin' even if ya vanish to nothin'."

Julius: "Even if I were to wish to complain, it would be difficult to find a way to do so when I would possess no mouth to complain with."

Reid: "Hah! This rascal ain't even gonna laugh at jokes, goddamn. Ya prick, what's yer name again?"

Julius lifted his eyebrows, upon being enquired for his name by the legend.

Though he had assuredly named himself on countless instances before him by now, he did not possess recollection of that. However, him not having recollection of that was now insignificant.

For he apprehended that with this question, Reid had indisputably, for the first time, acknowledged Julius.

Julius: "Julius Juukulius. Since it is a name easy to forget, I request of you to remember it."

Pronouncing a redundant remark he would not have perceived as humor simply a short duration ago, Julius pointed the tip of his Knight's sword towards Reid as well.

And once again, he implored for the aid of the six Spirits, who had naught but labored for him right before.

Should it be his present self and these girls, then he would surely reach to farther heights of the rainbow's aurora.

Al Clauseria and Al Clarista.

Borrowing the might of the six Spirits, the rainbow's aurora furling the power of the six elements—— Clauseria, which fired that maximal magic, and Clarista, which made it dwell upon the Knight's sword.

And beyond that, there was a secret ritual in which he had not once succeeded in due to his inexperience——

Julius: "——Hereby I vanquish."

Reid: "——Come."

In that juncture, an aurora submerged the white space, the bands of rainbow tackled the great man of crimson.

The original rainbow Spiritual Arts devised by Julius Juukulius, a secret amongst its secrets.

Neither launching the light of rainbow furling the six elements, nor making it dwell upon the sword, but cladding oneself in it, and exterminating the opponent by becoming the aurora itself.

Julius: "——Al Clanveir."

That superlative strike of the Spirit Knight, was directly assailed upon by a clear white flash.

△▼△▼△▼△

From the very beginning until the very end, the transcendent dimension of offense and defense far surpassed the ability of an untrained eye to keep pace with it.

Needless to speak of the colliding sword strikes, but the bewildering interchange of positions and footwork, which side was dominating and which side lay inferior, even that alone could not the pale cerulean eyes capture.

That had absolutely nothing to do with this flesh body not being her original belonging.

Merely, there present were those who were vying for a matter of life and death within that dimension, and compared to them, the world she lived in simply was an exceedingly lesser dimension, that being withstanding truth.

If the sense of worth and values of living beings reposed in their might as living creatures, then her self was frail, akin to worthlessness.

Moreover, that was also the evidence of her self having lived for a time equating multiple centuries in indolence, with her back turned towards the path of enhancing, uplifting oneself.

Ever since she first became self-cognizant, she'd had a hunch.

That the purpose of the unnatural existence named herself had been fulfilled the very moment she had been born.

In blunt term, if taking birth itself had been her purpose, her purpose had been fulfilled at that point of occurrence. Henceforth left as-is, she had purposelessly wandered the world, unable to evade the void of multiple centuries.

She did not mind even if she died. However, she merely possessed no reason to die.

Thus, delaying her demise in inactivity, for much too long, she had indulged in sloth.

And during her course of prolongation, she had happened upon the young girl.

Enchanted by the way of the young girl leading a vivid way of life, her glaciated life attained warmth.

The young girl who possessed a diminutive frame and spoke implausible big talk, whom would she turn out to be? Would she be unable to become anyone whatsoever? She yearned to bear witness to that with her own eyes.

And before one could take notice, such intrigue and interest of hers became insignificant——

???: "——I do not want to lose you, or the children you cherish."

She was aware, that what was termed as flowing time was kind, yet cruel.

Though time healed wounds, it also rendered emotions obsolete.

Having lived for a long, lasting period of time, she newly mused—— That she, did not want to forfeit this to the past.

???: "Though that too, is an impossible wish."

Even if she implored for it to stop, time evanesced all without halt.

Lives, bound to possess miniscule and feeble lifetimes, displayed all kinds of changes within their time.

Just as the nameless Knight, who'd had his Name plundered, who remained in the memories of no one, had proved that he was a singular human named Julius Juukulius.

——The Knight clad in the radiance of rainbow, plunged directly into the white light.

Against Julius, who had gambled and unveiled the secret ritual, Reid Astrea's actions were terribly simple.

To swing down the sword he had swung up, a deed of sword strikes likely repeated the most in this world—— it obliquely bisected the world, becoming a light which wrecked all in its path to ruin.

Neither a special magic, nor a special move.

With a mere swing of the sword, the world was scorched by light. Impossible to understand.

Did Reid Astrea exceeded norms, or were all Sword Saints alike?

Though what was certain was——

???: "——Julius."

That she wished to devote her strength, so that the aurora would not be overwhelmed by the absurd white light.

That was indubitably her genuine motive, however, an act like directly interfering into that battle, before even being suicidal, would be uncouth. That sin would not bequeath her even the right to complain, should even her soul be shattered in repentance.

And, the young girl—— Echidna, was aware that she could not do anything.

In this place, if there was anything she could do for Julius Juukulius, who had transformed into the aurora, that would be.

"Anastasia": "————"

Her hand on her slim chest, she sensed the existence slumbering in its depths.

In search for the reason why the original possessor of this flesh body would not awaken from her deep slumber, Echidna had arrived at the Tower of the sand sea—— However, that had been deceit.

Echidna was already aware of the reason as to why she would not wake up.

The girl, who declaimed her greed, who boasted her desire to attain all kinds of everything.

Never letting go of what she had once put in purse come what may, since she utmost loathed having to let go, having to part ways with anything, there was only one sole reason which she could reckon.

“Anastasia”: “Having ceded the body over to me, and temporarily lying dormant in your Od, you are in a state wherein you will not receive any interference from the outside world—— Because the Od, is a world of a certain kind of peculiarity.”

And by her own volition, she had secluded herself away in that place.

The reason being obvious—— Should she come outside, she would incur the effects. The abhorrent Authority of the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, she would incur its effects.

She would forget what she wished to never forget, relinquish what she wished to never relinquish.

Anastasia Hoshin would forget Julius Juukulius.

So was her purpose. However——

“Anastasia”: “It seems everybody who came to this Tower are all staunch boneheads—— All of them, appear to be lacking charm to the point of dying while dwelling over losing something.”

In this duration of nearly two months, she had attempted to imitate her way by herself, but now was the right time.

Besides, since she had observed his positives and negatives, his flurrying self as a nameless Knight from close vicinity, even if that girl was to forget, she could apprise her.

“Anastasia”: “Ah, is that so.”

Wielding no purpose, the Artificial Spirit who had fulfilled its duty upon the point of taking birth.

Though she had adjudged herself to possess solely that unpleasant duty, contrary to expectations, that was not where it came to an end.

The young girl she cherished, the Knight she cherished, and acting as the intermediating bridge between the chipped two.

Was that onus not a task of vital significance?

Was that not of such vital significance, that she could smile musing this had been the purpose of her birth? Thus——

"Anastasia": "——Not even seeing your Knight be at his coolest is a deed so wasteful, is it not unbecoming of your miserly self."

△▼△▼△▼△

——The white light hunted the aurora down as though to paint it out.

Furthermore he pressed, with the entirety of his soul, and having borrowed the might of the six Spirits he had reforged his Contract with.

He had gambled upon and unveiled a secret amongst secrets, whilst the opponent had merely swung the sword earnestly, solemnly—— Indeed, he was utterly astounded by that absurd exceeding of norms.

Simultaneously, since he also possessed the emotions enunciating this was how things must be overflowing within his chest, he found his own self to be irredeemable as well.

With a swing of the sword, the world fissured.

That, was the special move of the Sword Saint which transpired when Reinhard swung the sword as well.

Suddenly, in the midst of a rivalry between a life and a life, Julius contemplated.

Reinhard and Reid, should they battle each other, just who would prevail as more powerful?

Legend and legend, Sword Saint and Sword Saint, in the unattainable battle, who would be declared victorious?

Unfortunately, the opportunity to make certain of that would not pay a call.

Julius: “Then I have no choice, but to confirm it with this body of mine.”

The opportunity to exchange swords with Reinhard van Astrea withal Reid Astrea, befell only upon ones who reached this Tower.

Moreover, the possibility existed solely for Julius, and the young girl named Emilia, who had headed towards the upper stratum—— He bore no intention to concede that duty to anyone else.

Thus, what remained for him was to simply triumph.

To jostle this white light, and slay Reid Astrea with the radiance of rainbow.

For that purpose, the entirety of his soul, and his fighting strength, requiring a single step further——

Should a scintilla of pride and might, dwell upon the tip of the sword of the Finest of Knights——

???: “——Julius.”

A call improbable to reach.

Within impact rendering the passage of time indistinct, however, the time necessary for each convergence of swords was less than a fraction of a second. This, was the offense and defense of this momentary world.

In that space, much less, in the midst of a battle being fought at the risk of life and death, nobody’s voice could possibly reach.

Julius: “————”

However, the voice had certainly struck Julius.

Perhaps not his eardrums, but it instead had reached something far deeper within, the innermost depths of his chest.

Given he had resolved in his heart to wear the shell named Knight, he must respond to it without fail.

That was why, hearing the voice he could not possibly have heard, Julius turned towards the one whom could not possibly have viewed, and exchanged gazes with those pale cerulean eyes.

The luminescence dwelling in those large, spherical eyes, had distinctly changed from what it had been just before——

???: "——Go get 'em, my Knight."

——In that singular sentence, dwelled the one final push of sword strength he required.

Julius: "Ia! Qua! Aro! Ik! In! Ness!"

Requesting for one final push, he called to the Spirits with whom he had become a part of the aurora with.

In order to surmount the white light, beyond which present was the form of the enemy he ought to defeat, directly before him.

In order to make the tip of the sword, reach beyond the white light——

Julius: "OHHHHHHHHH——!!"

Opening his mouth to an extent unbefitting of him, he raised his voice to the extent of vomiting blood.

With an expression possessing the preparedness to die, discarding elegance into the wind, merely ensuring the bones supporting his self did not fracture, with his paramount dedication towards it, Julius stepped forth.

Reid: "————"

And, taking the rainbow's aurora intensifying its brilliance head-on, the counter of white light too escalated its vigor.

Furthermore, furthermore, strengthening their might, the radiance of rainbow and the white light collided vehemently——

Julius: “——Ah.”

That which seemed as though it would subsist for eternity, was met by an unforeseen fall of curtains.

△▼△▼△▼△

Julius: “——Ah.”

Dumbfounded, Julius noticed the feeble voice spill from his throat.

The mutual clash of their maximal powers, had had an abrupt curtain fall. However, without halting its vigor, his sword, embellished with the aurora, had directly stabbed through the opponent’s vitals.

Julius: “Why…”

Reid: “Tch, ah, shit, if this ain’t a borin’ endin’.”

Julius plunged into turmoil, being the one to be blamed for the stab, whilst on the other hand Reid, who had been stabbed, remained calm.

Heedless of the stab in his chest, he did not even express a frown.

Was that a deed of his tenacious force of will, and if not so, was the anomaly which had transpired on the flesh body of that great man the cause?

Disparate from the penetration of Julius’s sword, a wound—— no, a crevice had been yielded in the chest of Reid Astrea.

And, that was not confined to merely his chest. His arms and legs, neck and cheeks, throughout profuse sections of his body stretched wounds akin to cracked glass.

Intuitively, Julius comprehended what it was.

The distortion that was originally inconceivable was being corrected. This was a phenomenon of that mechanism.

Reid: “Ultimately, that’s what it be. The human named me ain’t fittin’ in any vessel other than myself.”

Whilst gazing at the palm of his fissuring self, the insight Reid grumbled was correct.

Captured due to the Authority of Gluttony, in the form of pillaging the right of control over that flesh body, Reid Astrea had acquired substance—— however, the truth that until the bitter end, this body belonged to the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Roy Alphard, who had become the foundation, would not change.

In other words, the receptacle named Roy Alphard had been unable to endure the workings of the norm-exceeding soul named Reid Astrea.

Its failure had materialized in the final phase of the battle against Julius.

Julius: “Then, I’d much rather if you might as well!”

Reid: “Well, if I didn’t get eaten by this guy, I may’ve gone at it ‘til the end. In that case, it’d’ve ended at the point ya felled the eyepatch after all, y’know?”

Julius: “Kh…”

Reid: “Kakaka. Everythin’ ain’t gonna go the way ya weak folks want. Do ya wanna cry now?”

Tossing the ordained sword aside, Reid mean-spiritedly laughed whilst revealing his teeth.

How come could he laugh that way? As-is, his disappearance was now a future set in stone.

Had he defeated Julius instead, it was perhaps possible that he would have been able to once again walk his life which had terminated once. Even though he had let that possibility slip through his hands.

Reid: “Are ya stupid, ya prick? Somethin’ like livin’ once again, who the hell’s gonna do somethin’ that troublesome. First of all, the hell’s gonna happen if I run into me somewhere, aye?”

Julius: “…I am sorry to say, but you have already passed away due to old age multiple centuries ago. Even if your present self were to walk around, for your former self that would be…”

Reid: “Ahhn? Then, are ya worshippin’ the mug of my kid’s kid who’s like an outsider or somethin’? Bullshit.”

Treating his own descendants as outsiders, his recent remark seemed to be his true sentiments.

Apparently and sincerely not possessing any interest in a second life, Reid crackled the bones of his neck.

Reid: “First of all, the hell’re ya tellin’ me to do after comin’ back to life, hey, ya prick. Like, playin’ ‘round with the smokin’ hottie who passed by earlier, tho’ the hottie over there’s pretty nice too. Then there’s also that sexy-lookin’ woman…”

Julius: “Oh, so do you truly possess no lingering attachment…?”

Reid: “Nah, damnit. Doin’ what I wanna do when I think I wanna do it is my style. Ya prick, it’d be much easier for ya if ya’d do that.”

Julius: “…My gratitude for the advice. However, that would instead be much more of a thorny path for me.”

His self, had chosen to willingly wear the shell.

Deceiving himself or acting as though a part of his foundation was something different, would also be apt labels.

Having realized that choice suited himself, that it aligned with his wishes, even if Julius perceived Reid’s extravagance to be dazzling, he would not opt for it.

Hearing that response of Julius’s, Reid snorted his nose in annoyance.

Subsequently, the wound on his chest—— the crevices born as a result of transcending the boundaries, with his fingers he touched the solitary wound differing from those,

Reid: “Ya prick, don’t’cha get it wrong, aight? Yer sword reachin’ was a fluke. Had this been my body, somethin’ like ya wouldn’t even be left able to rub snot onto others.”

Julius: “I would not do such a thing in the first place, though…”

Reid: “Hah! How borin’!”

Spitting out, Reid knocked Julius’s shoulder with the hand he had touched his chest with.

Whilst stiffening his body upon that impact, Julius took in a deep inhale.

He had yet to accept everything, to come to grips with everything.

However, he deemed letting these moments go by, by merely losing his presence of mind upon the occurrences before his eyes and experiencing turmoil, to be far more unendurable.

The crevices dilated, the end was already visible.

Hence, Julius hoisted his own Knight’s sword he had unsheathed, before his visage——

Julius: “From the bottom of my heart, I revere your ability with the sword.”

Reid: “I ain’t needin’ a bastard’s admiration—— I take my leave with my victory, Julius.”

Julius: “————”

With his name vocalized in his final pronouncements, Julius gazed in wonder.

However, as per the resolve in his heart to not be flustered, he concealed that astonishment behind a smile, and bowed.

Just as he had confidently named himself, before this legendary being, as the utmost finest Knight.

Just as the ideals of Julius Juukulius, had been molded to not bring shame to his admiration.

Julius: “Yes, until the very end—— It is your victory, Reid Astrea.”

Reid: “Hah, now that’s a nice face, ya damn dejected loser.”

With those words marking the end, the crevices of Reid Astrea dilated——

△▼△▼△▼△

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Norvak (source)

???: “————”

Unlike their visual impression, the crevices which dilated until the very end were not accompanied by sound.

Unlike the shattering of glass, the great man of red hair was extirpated like diminishing light—— in his stead, collapsed onto the clear floor was a young boy of a petite build, with the whites of his eyes visible.

One who ate the Memories and Names of others and handled them per his will, the blasphemer of Bizarre Eating.

The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Roy Alphard had collapsed, scuppered.

Roy: “————”

Indistinct whether he was alive or dead, Gluttony remained immobile with not a single twitch.

However, identical to Reid, he merely had the deep gash on the left side of his chest, its fatality incontestable.

Ascertaining merely that with his eyes, Julius lowered the Knight’s sword he had hoisted as a demonstration of honor, sheathing it into the scabbard he wielded, and turned backward.

The aurora had unraveled, and in Julius’s environs were six Spirits with augmented brilliance.

Without the strength of these girls, who had bloomed into maidens from buds, the one to be lying on the clear floor this way surely would have been him, rather than the opponent.

For that, he must convey his gratitude and appreciation conscientiously.

However, with apologies to those girls, he must defer that demonstration of gratitude.

Steadily, Julius advanced.

Ahead in the direction he was headed, intently watching Julius was a gorgeous, slender, petite female with pale-cerulean eyes. Undulating light-purple hair, the personage adorned with a white outfit unfitting for the Sand Dunes.

By her feet, was a white fox, with the pupils of its eyes wavering in suspense.

The presence of her form, who had always been passing off as a scarf, held significance.

Once again letting himself be aware of that, Julius closed his eyes. And——

Julius: "——Pleased to meet you."

The statement he had conveyed to the Sword Saint as a challenger heretofore, he expressed once again.

But the sensation deep within his chest in these moments, differed from the enhancement preceding battling.

However, there also existed something, which remained the same.

As though the opening of a new page in a tale of adventure, the adventurous heart of a youth yearning for the Knight.

???: "I am…"

Kneeling at that spot, Julius articulated the first words, to be met with a response by the other person.

His stance remaining lowered, Julius awaited the upcoming words. He reckoned he could wait for however long a duration.

What felicity this was, to have faith that should he wait, he would assuredly hear her words.

???: "——I am, Anastasia Hoshin."

Julius: "————"

Anastasia: "I want everythin' in this world… So, great 'n cool onii-san, what's yer name?"

With elegance, she smiled, and he could perceive exactly how she must have tilted her head afterwards.

Remaining knelt down and his face lowered and concealed, Julius took a short inhale with a "Ha", and,

Julius: "I am Julius Juukulius—— Your one and only Knight."

Anastasia: “————”

Julius: “You may have forgotten. However, I am one who has devoted the sword to you. One who dedicates the entirety of his strength for you, and aids your will.”

A respectful bow with the Knight’s sword placed on the floor, and in addition, Julius at last raised his countenance.

Before him, no matter what gaze should his master have, he would not regret.

It was unbefitting of a Knight to lose presence of mind, to be confounded, face downward.

For the very existence who put up appearances the utmost, and sought to possess a cool and charming air, was whom Julius admired and yearned for.

And looking down upon that Julius, the young girl narrowed her spherical eyes,

Anastasia: “Really? I don’t remember tho’… But.”

Julius: “————”

Anastasia: “At the first glance, I thought—— That I gotta make this onii-san mine.”

At such proximity, were the blazing, sparkling eyes of his eternally craving master, revealing the intent to not relinquish anything and everything.

To the Greed seeking to obtain everything, Julius Juukulius devoted his sword once again.

A sublime play, like the tale of a master and Knight in fiction——

The restoration of the plundered master-servant bond, was realized in the Second Floor, Electra.

That was, the accomplishment of eliminating one of the five obstacles set forth by Natsuki Subaru.

The Great Library Pleiades, the Second Examination—— was hereby concluded.

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Floating (source)

Arc 6 Chapter 86 – Conversing of What Yesterday Held

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 7 “Ram”, Parts 7-9

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

Since long before, she had harbored misgivings.

Her master, Roswaal L. Mathers, to whom she devoted her allegiance, for the purpose of achieving his ultimate goal, found it necessary to kill the Dragon who protected the Kingdom of Lugunica.

She was a vital and indispensable piece for that plan of Roswaal’s, so had Ram heard from none other than himself in an event that occurred close to ten years in the past.

Having saved Ram and ■■ from the village of the Oni Clan blazing scarlet, Roswaal sought recompense.

And, in exchange for retribution for the Oni Clan, Ram had decided to pay that compensation.

That she would thus cooperate, be it for the plan to kill the Dragon or whatever else.

But there was merely a singular point to which Ram was unable to find the answer within herself, that being the essential way of killing the Dragon.

It was not easy. Even if plans were to be meddled around with and measures were to be taken, that was not easy. Should that moment arrive, simply what would Ram be able to do.

Roswaal: “You will know when the time comes—— Your role, which only you two, elder sister and ■, can fulfill.”

She felt she had once heard such words, from which a fragment had been chipped off.

Curiously, she had never given deep thought as to what that had meant until today, but——

Ram: “It is finally understood. What Roswaal-sama was aiming for.”

All of Roswaal’s actions were for the purpose of the ultimate goal he had clasped throughout his long lifetime.

For that purpose, he had infiltrated himself deep within the Kingdom of Lugunica, for that purpose he had saved Ram and ■■, for that purpose he had kept control of Sanctuary as a litmus test for one’s resolve, for that purpose he had tested Natsuki Subaru.

Even if he inevitably had to alter his original scheme, the entirety of the preparation until that point had not been futile—— No, he would not let it be rendered futile, that was who he was.

Hence, the answer came forth within Ram as well.

The reason why Roswaal took custody of a pair of young Oni, an elder sister and a ■ ■.

The ■ had been taken in as substitute for Ram’s lost horn.

The elder sister and ■ that were Ram and ■■, with the two of them acting as a single Oni, he had taken them in his hand for killing the Dragon.

Naturally, not even Roswaal could escape from the effects of the Authority of Gluttony.

As a matter of consequence, he too must have forgotten why ■■ had been taken into his mansion. However, even if he had forgotten, he must have immediately discerned his own self’s aim.

And, whilst observing Ram and the others make strenuous efforts to recover ■■■ from the damage caused by Gluttony, he did not disclose that truth. Honestly——

Ram: “His scrupulous nature won’t change no matter what, will it.”

Though his plans had once suffered a setback thanks to Subaru’s actions, he had yet resumed his handiworks for fulfilling his goal behind the scenes, while remaining vigilant for a chance to strike.

One nasty nature. With Ram not there to watch him, just what would he be doing about now?

However, so she thought as well.

——That, in this journey, by the point of having allowed Ram to accompany Subaru and the others as they tried to save ■■, could Roswaal have perchance foreseen the possibility of things turning out this way?

She was possibly overthinking it.

To begin with, the appearance of the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony in Pleiades Watchtower was an unforeseen circumstance, and there was no way he could have possessed confidence in Ram and ■■ being placed into a hazardous situation.

This could have possibly been an excessive misapprehension on Ram's part, an overestimation of the man she dearly loved. However——

Ram: "——It feels far better to believe that the man you love placed trust in you anyways."

To believe that he had thought that, should Ram be there, ■■ and the other members would remain safe and protected.

To believe that he had thought that, if need be, Ram would take notice of the supposition Roswaal had concealed, bearing faith that she would make use of the trump card for the purpose of killing the Dragon by her volition.

That the man named Roswaal L. Mathers had acknowledged the ten years of the woman named Ram, to believe so felt far, far better. That was why——

Ram: "——Right now, Ram truly feels the greatest she ever has. Kindly get beaten down."

△▼△▼△▼△

The accomplishments established by the Fist King, Neiji Rockhardt, were somewhat of a legend in Gladiator Island Ginunhive of the Sacred Vollachian Empire—— No, had once been a legend.

Having been met by the tragedy of the Authority of Gluttony, now with both Name and Memories plundered, no one anywhere who knew of the achievements established by him as a gladiator existed.

On the Gladiator Island, wherein strength was used for exhibition, Neiji, solitarily, using his empty hands as weapons, had survived hundreds of deathmatches, to finally attain the right of liberation from slavery.

Conceiving the refined fighting spirit in his fists, intercepting swords and daggers, before his fists which shattered steel any obstacle whatsoever was equivalent to a maiden's soft skin. He likely could have been termed as the one to have beaten the most humans to death in history.

With his inordinately brutal nefarious techniques, the Carnivorous Beast, Beli Heinelga, was a rare serial killer who had made the Holy Kingdom of Gusteko shudder—— No, once had made it shudder.

Having been met by the tragedy of the Authority of Gluttony, now with both Name and Memories plundered, the vast counts of misfortune and precepts he had yielded as a murderer remained not in anyone's memories.

By birth, Beli had displayed abnormal growth, and acquired strength of physical body impossible to be realized in average humans. And, embracing the men of his liking to death, he had piled up copious atrocious crimes[306].

Superhuman strength which his enormous build materialized, and sturdy skin which sustained not a single scratch from swords and daggers. This murderer, who sought touch and warmth, had been one of the most dreadful, feared criminals, along with the Bowel Hunter.

The career history of the Leaper, Dorkell, was an eccentric one. Formerly a merchant living in Kararagi City-States, Dorkell had been a deviant who had disengaged from his path upon hearing the voice of something not human—— so he had once been.

Having been met by the tragedy of the Authority of Gluttony, now with both Name and Memories plundered, the truth of him having become a laughingstock for many as a deviant vanished, with no one who remembered that existing, any more.

One certain day, Dorkell discarded his life including his wife and children. And, opting for the path espousing that which did not exist, he became a freak who chose to have contact with the Witch Cult.

[306] Translation note from Witch Cult Translations: "Here, I have gone for «embracing» for a bit of ambiguity in wording, because the use of «抱» could literally be translated as «hugging the men of his liking to death» could also imply that he used to rape and kill the men of his liking."

Though Dorkell had manifested a paramount power differing from magic, it deviated from the doctrine of the Witch Cult, a heresy within heresy banished even from the Witch Cult.

In other words, they were transcendental beings, from the kinds of enigmatic persons, eccentric persons, and deranged persons.

Impossible to be matched by ordinary humans, they remained unfinished by the mere virtue of being themselves as well; being blended together with all possible kinds of Memories within Gluttony, they had been finished into articles of greater superlativeness.

What would be the consequence should Neiji Rockhardt obtain Beli Heinelga's endurance and Dorkell's ability of phantom teleportation?

It would be, the fruition of a singular brutal, fiendish, atrocious existence seldom seen throughout time.

Until now and amongst all of what yesterday had held, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Ley Batenkaitos had not achieved that.

For within the grand hotpot named his self, by blending all probable kinds of Memories together, he feared the very existence named himself being taken into the hotpot.

However, even if he were to drink up the contents of the mixed hotpot, he would not be taken in—— at the very least, that was what Batenkaitos's notion had come to be.

And since it had come to be so, he experimented what all he had never ventured to do until now, possessing not the slightest of qualms or hesitance for breaking the established bounds of his own self.

For the Gourmet who ate every possible kind of excelling, transcending talent, history, potentiality in this world, utterly—— all until the very horizons of "gourmet delicacies", persisting in amassing it all within oneself, was precisely whom Ley Batenkaitos was.

Thus, on this day, what was born in the Tower situated at the eastern edge of the world, was a Warlock[307] agglutinated with every technique and odd talent, regardless of heredity and *posteriori*.

[307] The Japanese term is the exact same as Hector's title, "魔人", the male version of "Witch" (魔女).

The Warlock possessed arms which destroyed all, possessed a flesh body which did not take damage from any type of attacks, possessed magical arts which rejected and countered any possible technique, and was endowed with even the wisdom, genius and intellect to grasp everything that existed.

No matter how extensive a survey should be taken of history, never had there been a being who excelled in every single kind of ability to this extent, and neither would any other take birth hereafter, for thousands of years to come.

This, was a selection of the world's possibilities, brought forth by the abominable calamity referred to as a Witch Factor.

Born from the grand hotpot which condensed solely excelling articles, the supreme "gourmet delicacy" itself——

Ram: "——You shall be given three chances."

With that rare existence before her, the young girl with pink-colored hair uttered with three fingers raised.

The young girl, bleeding from her forehead, with an icy gleam in her light-crimson eyes. She was in a condition wherein wounds covered her entire body, and multiple spots of her slim build had sustained tremendous injuries which would impede in movement.

Even aside from those, there existed a mountain's worth of reasons why she should not be able to stand up. He was aware of that.

The prime cause not being wounds or blood loss, but that her petite body failed to function as a vessel for accepting the existence named herself—— Truly heartrending, he ruminated so.

Ram: "Three times, you shall be allowed to strike first. There is something Ram would like to test. Exceptional, is it not?"

However, such deep emotions concerning her not in the slightest, the young girl asserted so whilst three of her fingers remained raised, as though to instigate the opposing side.

Thrice, a deathly verdict. To begin with, even once would be implausible for her to endure.

And, neither did he possess any particular reason to disregard that avouch.

He not at all contemplated whether this was a trap, either.

For the young girl was not one who would meaninglessly proffer such negotiation. He merely thought he must earnestly impart to her, that unbridled confidence brought about the destruction of oneself on instances as well.

That upon being taken into the same grand hotpot, there shall also be things understood——

Ley: "——Nee-sama, I'll be going."

Vehemently, making his hind legs amassing strength erupt, he hammered a blow as per her wish.

That was a strike crammed with the Fist King's technique and finesse of destructive force, possessing far too excessive might for the destruction of a solitary young girl, and it was absorbed by well-featured visage of the young girl——

Ram: "Now, the first one."

Ley: "——Hk!?"

In the moment he conceived he had captured her with certainty, the face of the young girl evaded the fist from a vicinity seemingly close enough to graze past her peach fuzz. And positioning her hand on his outstretched arm, a knee strike fired by her smashed the right arm at the elbow.

An improbable happening. The tenacious flesh body was one that even the slashes of a Holy Sword could not penetrate into, and yet the arm that had been stretched, and the joint of its elbow—— by kneeing into the fixed point that existed solely at this point, had been destroyed by the young girl. However——

With the impact of the fractured right arm as-is, he fired his left foot up towards the young girl's visage.

Though not reprisal for the arm, the strike of his knee aimed for her face as well. The lengthy, slender leg, the fair knee smashed and crushed the young girl's tender snout, ruining her gorgeous visage——

Ram: "Second."

Upon hearing the utterance vocalized by those slim lips, he doubted his ears.

He had executed it such that her mouth would be rendered defunct. However, responding to the knee strike approaching from the side, the young girl moved her hand as though nimbly tracing it, and gently averted its trajectory upward.

The loosened knee smoothly passed over the young girl's head, as though it had been loosened to trace the empty skies from the very beginning. And——

Ram: "Third."

With his right arm and left knee's strikes dodged, using the impetus of his gyrating body, he fired a rebuff from his left elbow, sharp and solid; upon making a direct hit it would crush the young girl's cranium like a berry, and spill its contents out onto the floor of the Tower.

Indeed—— that was what ought to have happened.

The effect of elbow rebuff aiming for the young girl's temple was limited to making a few strands of her pink hair flutter, and naught more.

And, the young girl, dodging the elbow as if informed of its arrival, grasped his face once again with her extended hands,

Ram: "Truly a fool."

And, speaking with the maximum in ruthlessness, she vigorously slammed his cranium onto the floor.

△▼△▼△▼△

Twisting, turning, winding, meandering, Batenkaitos changed his form before her eyes and charged, advancing towards her, and upon knocking him to the ground, Ram pointed three fingers towards his face.

Ram: "One who spars thinking he has three chances, gets defeated in all three of those chances. Should you spar with not even the serious intent to win, then you shall be abandoned even by fortune."

Ley: “Bhu, gah… Hk.”

Ram: “Thank you. It has been proven—— Not even the serendipity of time, is now an enemy of Ram.”

For Ram, the utmost appalling enemy was absurd fortune itself.

However, Ram had exorcised that by her own hand, and had made even that prostrate before herself.

No longer was there anything to be fearful of.

Ley: “——Hk.”

Sprawled on the ground, Batenkaitos swung both his legs up, and stood up with the momentum of their downswing. And towards the approaching enemy seeking to hammer his fractured arm in, Ram stepped ahead, wielding no vacillation.

Blood streamed down from her forehead. However, that ache and sense of loss boiled Ram’s blood from the innermost depths.

Ah, how truly infuriating it was. This sensation, this enchantment, always had she thought of it as vexatious.

The odious Oni instincts, warmly welcoming battling, exalting the brandishing of strength, the craving which boiled blood for the purpose of killing enemies who ought to be killed, Ram had always detested them.

That was why, that night, when the horn sprouting from her forehead had been broken off, she had thought she had been liberated.

Ram: “How truly ironic.”

Grousing so, Ram caught the arm being thrusted and threw her opponent over her shoulder with identical momentum. Casting him onto the floor, she kicked his head, propelling him further towards the interior of the aisle.

She could not allow him to draw close to her rear, wherein was the grievously-wounded ground dragon, along with the young girl leaning on the wall.

Rem: "————"

The young girl who resumed her slumber without change, her horn was fleetingly glimmering on her forehead asserting its existence.

Originally, the young girl who remained asleep, possessing no will of her own, could not have made her horn function, regardless of being a member of the Oni Clan.

However, even with the actual feeling of that remaining lost, Ram was twin sisters with the young girl—— that which was referred to as "Synesthesia", was an ethereal link oft tied between blood-related beings.

Having attended to the perpetually-slumbering Rem during the past year, Ram too had sensed that existence itself.

Not by merely the similitude of outward appearance, but precisely due to the presence of that sensation, Ram had succeeded in objectively accepting the truth of that girl being her younger sister without dissent.

However, between herself and Rem, even Synesthesia remained futile.

Had Rem gotten even a single nightmare, her fright may have gotten transmitted to Ram, however, during this past year, not even once had anything akin gotten transmitted to her.

In other words, the perpetually slumbering Rem saw no dreams—— Unceasingly, she had simply gazed into the darkness at the back of her eyelids, merely respiring within a desolate, void world.

Thus, it was naught but a coincidence for her to have noticed this way of abusing said Synesthesia here.

Though irksome, it was due to Subaru's idea. Because he had taken up Ram's burden through an odd power and bestowed upon her the strength to fight, she had conceived an idea accomplishing the same.

Those connected together with Synesthesia shared mighty sentiments, or even wounds and agony at times.

Though she was ignorant of its principle, this hypothesis had been present within a Book in Beatrice's Forbidden Library, which she had once read in the past.

——That what was termed as Synesthesia, operated via the Ods of two differing individuals being connected.

What was termed as the Od, was the source of power existing in the depths of a human being—— it could also be synonymous for the soul.

Though on instances it was also used in place of Mana as power for utilizing magic, originally, the Od was the pure property itself that made a human, human.

The consequence of having a domain that could not be trespassed by anyone, linking those born of the same womb mutually, perhaps resulted in Synesthesia, so propounded theory.

In the end, it came to be determined as folklore, and was not something that had been proven.

However, since it had been left in the Forbidden Library, it surely was not some phony spiel either. Above all else, Ram personally had taken a liking to that theory.

To have one's own self and someone else be connected together by birth, was a lovely thing.

Ram: "A multitude of problems were caused due to that bothersome horn, after all."

The impulse of destruction transmitted by that white horn, Ram loathed it.

She had been exasperated by her environs, lionizing her as the reincarnation of the Oni God as well. There existed not a fragment of connection, between that obscure obsolete being, and Ram.

Ram would not deem value in such an entity.

Henceforth, to have one's own self and someone else be connected together by birth, independent of such an entity, was a lovely thing.

And, if such a connection with someone truly did exist——

Ram: "——Certainly, by birth itself, Ram could not have been stopped from loving her."

Even as an infant, she would not pay regard to means for the sake of protecting that bond.

For the sake of protecting her, for the sake of admiring her, for the sake of adoring her, for the sake of loving her, she would surely devote her all. Thus——

Ram: “Please do forgive. Your bad nee-sama, who is making you shoulder the burden at this time as well.”

By way of Synesthesia, Ram would share the burden levied upon her own flesh body to her sleeping younger sister.

It was in consequence of having experienced Subaru’s Authority by herself once. Having witnessed something once, Ram could materialize it identically, roughly.

What Subaru had done was an identical contrivance—— it possibly coercively connected others’ Od with his own Od, inducing a fairly arbitrary Synesthesia. Subaru’s side could possibly consign his burden over if he felt inclined to do so as well, but since Subaru was a fool, he would not do so.

Contrarily, by taking it upon himself, he endeavored to abate the burden of his allies.

Ram: “——Truly a fool.”

Words she had pronounced toward Batenkaitos a short time ago.

However, despite being the same words, they did not echo the same.

What Subaru had achieved through the Authority, Ram could reconstruct it with Rem, whom she was connected to through Synesthesia.

She was oblivious as to what had transpired at Subaru’s side. However, this would surely serve to ease him. Ram too, could abscond from the repulsive situation namely being connected with Subaru for long.

In lieu, Ram’s burden was streaming towards Rem, although——

Rem: “————”

Rem, perpetually slumbering, spoke naught.

Merely gallantly, splendidly, with the white horn she was made to grasp in her overlapping hands—— Ram's broken horn that had been fitted inside her wand, with that as a catalyst, she was consigning the Mana flowing into her own horn over to Ram.

It was unfathomable how prodigious a burden would be laid onto Rem's body for mediating the expansive Mana which Ram required.

——Therefore, this was a decisive battle of brief duration.

Ley: "Nee-saaamaaaaaa!!"

A roar into time, after having been hurled by her kick, Batenkaitos rebounded towards Ram whilst smiling.

Utilizing the might of the Leaper, the magical technique erased the existing distance in-between in the span of a blink of an eye—— however, even that technique of phantom teleportation was rendered futile should it be viewed in its entirety by the opponent.

Ram: "You certainly are slow, sluggard. At this rate, Ram will become an old woman."

She purloined the opponent's field of vision with Clairvoyance.

The opponent's focus, eye movements, the part wherein strength was being poured, by synthesizing these she could read the aim with greater ease than reading the mind.

Dodging the perforating palm, she reversely twisted all five of its fingers as it slipped through.

Pounding a rebuff into his throat seeking to give rise to a shriek, she slammed the opponent into the wall with a sharp spinning kick.

Ley: "Kah…!"

Ram: "Although, Ram is cute even when she has grown old."

Whilst pronouncing so, she seized the opponent's nape through his clothes and lowered it, dropping him onto the floor by his head yet again. Pelting that face with her heel, she pulverized his snout.

Stepping backward and evading both of the arms attempting to grasp her, she pelted him with innumerable blades of wind.

Ley: “——GYAHHHHHHH!!”

Ram: “What an ugly shriek, coming from such an adorable face.”

His entire body slashed by blades of wind, Batenkaitos disappeared whilst spouting blood.

As ever, his flesh body unremittingly repeated transfiguration, however, solely what was atop his neck, that which she was acquainted with by sight, did he not attempt to transform.

She was close to vomiting. Though Ram would not, because that would be inelegant.

Ley: “————”

Whilst shedding immense blood, Batenkaitos artlessly swooped down upon her.

In greater precision, he was surely making free use of miraculous superhuman techniques. Coalescing the might of multifarious transcendental beings, from the outset, he was certainly formulating techniques impossible of being reconstructed by anyone.

That excelling blitz, specializing in all possible orientations, was shut down by Ram through outstripping violence.

She guillotined those monumental techniques of hundreds, of thousands, using might worth millions. This was what the battle had now come to be.

She sought not to even come in contact with Batenkaitos. Her condition felt well.

She had grown accustomed to it in Subaru’s absence. She had unfastened approximately two more shackles.

Probably, making up for fifty-percent of her prime—— no, since Ram had been very young in those days, aspects of her that had matured were far mightier now compared to Ram back then.

And, to not wallow in that might, was Ram’s forte.

Ram: “Having the horn broken was correct after all.”

If it were not for that night, she may have eventually yielded to the horn’s allurement.

Though she wanted to proclaim that to be improbable, she could not ascertain if it truly was improbable. Thus, Ram attested to the present being correct, and boasted the invigorating nature of the path she had walked.

Owing to the loss of her horn, Ram had lived without having to become the Oni she detested.

Ram: “To begin with, if it were not for that night, Ram could not have met Roswaal, so it was not even worth making a comparison.”

With no greater conclusion, wielding that as the answer, Ram presented her palm forwards.

In front of her palm appeared Batenkaitos, having leapt through space. His countenance, astonished by having the point of his appearance read through, was gripped tight by her,

Ram: “You cannot fly consecutively, isn’t it? Ram has grown tired of looking at your magic tricks. And of that face as well.”

Ley: “Wai——”

Ram: “No waiting.”

With an icy pronouncement, Ram materialized a blade of wind in the palm which grasped her opponent’s face.

Within that juncture, his eyes, his nose, his lips, his ears, all possible parts of his face were slashed, and Batenkaitos screeched whilst vomiting blood.

And at the same pace, she gouged his face with the blade of wind until it was minced to naught.

And, from Ram’s palm, who sought to accomplish so, Batenkaitos’s form disappeared in but an instant.

However, albeit he had escaped, he would not be able to escape from the wounds, from the agony, from the reality.

Ley: “Ah, ahh, AHHHHH——!!”

While squalling, Batenkaitos writhed as he shed profuse blood instead of tears.

While observing that, Ram steadily moved her feet forward towards his side.

Hearing Ram’s approaching footsteps, Batenkaitos’s form changed.

The proprietor of a gigantic, burly flesh body—— Knocking the imminent fist down, she shattered his knee.

Kicked down, Batenkaitos’s figure altered in order to escape from Ram.

The giant with a bearded face, curling up as to solidify his defense—— Kicking his frame upward, she nailed him onto the ceiling with a barrage of fists, gradually transforming what was below his skin, which was the subject of boast, into lumps of flesh.

In order to kill Ram, who conferred upon him interminable torture, Batenkaitos’s form altered.

The bald old man, the magical technique of phantom teleportation—— Whilst pitying the magical trick whose stratagem had already come to light, she caught him, drove his face into the wall, and sprinted as though to whittle his entire frame.

Ley: “Ah, BABABABABABABABABABAAAA—— Hk!!”

Repressed by Ram’s prodigious might, Batenkaitos’s entire frame was sanded, retaining no place to escape to. Winding and meandering, his form transfigured within Ram’s grasp as though seeking the optimum solution.

Suppressing it altogether, Ram grieved for the hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of victims with all her might.

A memorial held via vehemence for those men and women who had been captured by Gluttony, and had the arts they forged, the paths they walked, the emotions they loved, trampled upon, slighted and disparaged.

No longer would arts, paths, emotions be utilized.

For naught was efficacious against Ram.

Ram: “Kindly take your own responsibility, by yourself.”

Swinging her arm, Ram heaved aside the blasphemer who had his entire frame tempestuously sanded.

Falling over the floor of the Watchtower, Batenkaitos shuddered and trembled. Slowly, steadily, gradually, his form proceeded to alter.

Having relied on multitudes of Memories, his form changed——

Ram: “Ah, long time no see. Ram wished to meet this face. Though this would make for around the third time doing so.”

Ley: “——Ah, kah, ah.”

As she wiped off the blood on her forehead and loosened her lips, ahead of Ram’s glance was Batenkaitos.

It was Batenkaitos, in the truest possible purport. Not the cunning and wily existence who had, until now, borrowed the faces and techniques of others, but Batenkaitos, who had returned to his own face and form.

Regardless of whom should one become, of whom should one depend on, of whom should one resort to, it was impossible to escape from oneself.

Just as even upon losing her horn, the actuality that Ram was an Oni did not change.

Just as even upon having her Memories plundered, the actuality that Ram was Rem’s elder sister did not change.

Ram: “In the very end at least, would you like to try resisting using your own strength?”

Ley: “————”

Ram: “By the way, you said something curious on the spiral staircase, didn’t you—— It seems you have a younger brother or younger sister, isn’t it. For the sake of your younger siblings, how about putting your willpower on display?”

Collapsed, Batenkaitos's painful breathing abruptly diminished.

He had not lost his life. He had reacted to Ram's remark.

Younger brother and younger sister, the moment he heard the echo of those words, Batenkaitos's breath faintly calmed down. And, steadily, Batenkaitos's body stood up on the spot——

Ley: "Ou…r… ou…r… little sister, don't…[308]"

Ram: "Don't lay a finger on her, you say? Sorry, but do you think you are in a position where you can make such an insistence? Have you ever lent your ears to someone's plea even once?"

Ley: "But, still…"

Ram: "————"

Distorting his bloodstained, crumpled face, Batenkaitos pleaded with a tearful voice.

Upon the call of that poignant yet remarkably genuine echo, Ram slightly straitened her eyes. Afterwards, along with a sigh, she closed her eyes.

Ram: "Will think——"

Ley: "——Nee-sama, is far too kind."

Within the juncture, the moment her gaze went astray, Batenkaitos bequeathed simply those words behind, and erased his form.

The spatial leap of the Leaper, Dorkell—— leaving not a single vestige behind, the blasphemer had vanished from her field of vision.

——He had escaped.

[308] Translation note by Witch Cult Translations: "The two "our" are «oretachi» (俺たち) and «bokutachi» (僕たち) respectively. In context of his siblings, Ley uses «oretachi» to refer to all three of them or him and Roy, and «bokutachi» to refer to himself individually. He also uses «bokutachi» then «oretachi» in this specific order. For the first time here, Ley says 'oretachi' first then «bokutachi». Likely emphasising that though she is his and Roy's younger sister, she is HIS sister above all".

△▼△▼△▼△

Ley: “Haha! Ahahaha! Ahakhahahaha~!”

Utilizing the odd talent of the Leaper, Dorkell, with freedom, Batenkaitos had fled from Ram’s territory.

No longer would he consider recklessness like eating Ram. Paying no regard to appearances, he chose flight.

Can’t win. Can’t win. Can’t win against that one.

Just as he had thought, that one was a monster. How convenient of her to have bought time and return after becoming more powerful as well.

That one, was a kind of existence who would not get atop neither the platter of Gourmet nor the platter of Bizarre Eating.

Ley: “Louis and Roy, really sorry you two, but you knooow! Preliminary preparation of ingredients is crucial in Gourmet.”

Whilst pressing the injuries of his entire body, Batenkaitos melancholically laughed upon his younger brother and sister who had been aiming for the same prey.

Louis had promptly withdrawn from the war front to safety, and Roy too would be rampaging in a separate site about now. If that Oni were to just aim for those two, he would also be able to withdraw at leisure.

Since Roy of Bizarre Eating did not know when to retreat, he would possibly finally die, but it could not be helped.

Rather, he had been getting fed up with Roy’s Bizarre Eating. Because that chap laid waste to hunting grounds per his pleasure, there must have been instances where gourmet delicacies supposed to come around to his side had gotten stolen away.

——No, had what his self feasted upon until now, truly been Gourmet Delicacies?

Ley: “Each and every single one, useless… Ahhh, shit! Shit, shit, shit! Something like that, to think something like that exists, you knooow! Even though it would’ve been all good had we not known about it, you knooow!!”

That, was not a sentiment induced by the feelings of a younger sister doting on her elder sister.

That, was a sentiment yearning for something inestimable, unfathomable, immense—— born from Batenkaitos’s within, in the truest of truest sense, a potent emotion wishing for its desire from the depths of his heart.

Want to, completely eat that one. With all of body and soul, want to completely savor that one.

Championing Gourmet, he intended to have eaten all possible emotions and transcending, excelling talents. However, now that he was aware of the presence of a “real deal” in this world, everything had faded away.

All of what the existence named Ley Batenkaitos, as the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, had trusted as possessing worth and garnered, crumbled to ruin and transformed into rubbish.

Those lavish dinner tables which had been visible with such glisten, had been reduced to sand pits with mud dumplings atop.

Ley: “Want, that one.”

*Want it, want it, want it, want it want it want it

Don't want to savor anything other than that one. Don't want to fulfill oneself with anything other than that one.

Ley: "Ugh, guhehhh."

While sprinting, vomit leaked from the edge of Batenkaitos's mouth.

Pain or anguish were not the cause. It was merely unbearable. Articles he had trusted to be the finest were not so, and due to having become aware of what was supreme, all of what fulfilled his self was foul.

Why, had he regarded anything aside from that one as splendid? Commended anything aside from that one? Surfeited anything aside from that one?

Simply what of him would be Gourmet, should he love anything aside from the truly splendid——

Ley: "Ahhh, that's right, that is right, isn't that right, surely that is right, certainly that is right, indeed that is right, because that is right, because we wish for it to be right! Gluttonous drinking! Gluttony!"

Surging appetite, hunger advancing toward fulfillment, and, the outcry from his heart wishing for and imploring desire.

The desire to become one, the desire to blend together, if appetite was to intake external existences, then the Gluttony impelling his self was superlative love.

Ley: "Love you, love you… Yes! Love you! Nee-sama… No, Ram! We love you——"

The maximal emotion blooming within his self, whilst he attempted to clamor it loud, his words were abruptly interrupted.

The cause was pain, and that it was the incidence of a novel anguish.

Ley: "——Ah?"

Checking his cheek, Batenkaitos ascertained his palm dyed with rich blood.

A fresh slash, a wound ripping Batenkaitos's cheek, who had been heading towards the outside of the Tower in order to escape—— its cause being empty space.

Ley: "————"

Wordlessly stretching his finger to that point, Batenkaitos observed his finger be cut.

In the empty space, was an invisible blade.

Ley: "Huh."

That was, the same technique Batenkaitos had displayed to Ram at the spiral staircase.

The art of installing blades of invisibility in space was a legendary shinobi[309] technique, but it did not matter whose Memories those had been in, since he had already thrown them away.

The issue was the presence of a blade here, which Batenkaitos did not remember placing behind.

Ley: "It can't be…"

Avoiding the blade that had slightly cut his finger, Batenkaitos attempted to advance his feet further towards the interior—— his tiptoes were blown off, and he inclined backwards whilst shrieking with an "Ahii".

And, with the inclining back of his head also being shaved off slightly, he rigidified his face and stood still.

——He was enclosed, by invisible blades.

Ley: "…Haha, seriously?"

He had shown it to her, merely once.

Once, in the midst of battle; being an invisible technique as well, so she must not have seen it either.

[309] Also known as *ninjas*.

Moreover, she had not ever practically even stepped foot in this place. Yet regardless, she had seized his escape route, and had stationed invisible blades in advance.

Ley: "————"

Batenkaitos put his hand, not on his left eye which had been slashed by the blade of wind and ceased functioning, but on his right eye which was narrowly in good health—— Through Clairvoyance, Ram was jointly sharing this eye.

She had not allowed Batenkaitos to escape. Overlapping with this eye, she would not let him escape.

Ley: "Hihah."

Batenkaitos laughed. No longer could he do anything, but laugh.

He had loved. For the first time, he had mightily, powerfully yearned for something. He was charmed, by that unordinary essence. And——

Ley: "Ah! Wait, please do wait! Hold on hold on, a bit more! Just a bit more! Just a bit more, so!"

No matter how much did he implore to Clairvoyance, the voice would reach, that was per knowledge.

Thus, his frantic calls were not for the opponent to hear. They were for impelling his own self.

In great fluster and haste, Batenkaitos held fast to the wall immediately beside him.

He had done something impetuous by discarding away what he had eaten. If only the remarkable genius of the Fist King had remained, he could have overcome this facing no hardship.

Deferring those emotions as well, Batenkaitos struck his arms into the invisible blades. The wrists of both of his hands erupting, blood cascaded out of the mouth of those wounds.

It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts but, pain, doesn't matter right now.

Ley: "Please do accept, our feelings! Please do watch over, our wishes!"

Merely, pressing his arms spouting blood onto the wall, with all his strength, he drew letters.

With dusky blood, using his small, petite body with all his might, he drew enormous, gigantic letters onto the wall of the Tower of Sand.

Ley: “Buhaaaa.”

And, making his own self stand back, he viewed those letters with his right eye dilated.

For those letters of blood depicted on the wall, to reach the one whom he eternally wished for from the bottom of his heart.

Because if it was her, then certainly, until the very end of the end, she would kindly watch over whilst remaining overlapped with his own self.

Ley: “Ah, love y——”

——Before he could reach the end of his words, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony was beheaded by a blade of wind.

△▼△▼△▼△

Ram: “——Fula.”

Swinging her finger, having hurled the blade of wind, Ram whispered merely a single word.

Even if the proportion of magic affected its range of effect, its power itself did not undergo severe change. Not to mention, if only a slim neck was to be blown off through the cutting ability of the blade of wind, then even minimum power sufficed.

Pursuing the back of Gluttony who had fled, Ram had fired a solitary blade of wind.

Through Clairvoyance, she had easily grasped the trail of Gluttony making a desperate escape. She had employed certain tricks as a hurdle in his path for her aim to be precise, but they seemed to have functioned well for how hurriedly they had been constructed.

And, on the brink of the final blade’s arrival, Gluttony had undertaken abnormal conduct.

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Setowi (source)

Slashing off his own arms, and using that blood, he had drawn letters of blood onto the wall.

Though that which was squalid and dreadfully arbitrary, was malignant bedevilment possessing no worth to even be viewed——

Ram: "————"

At the very end of the end, having watched over the upward soar as those blood letters whirled and flew past, she closed her eyes.

She had done so entirely because she could not have taken relief otherwise. She had not an atom of obligation that she ought to watch over them.

The blasphemer had erred in his final choice.

Had he put his life on the line for the sake of his younger siblings, Ram would not have denied him mercy either. However, putting aside the undeniable genuineness of his words, he had also used that as bait and deceived Ram, making it also a tool for his own self's survival.

He likely did not know the method of restoring what had been eaten either. Had he known, he was supposed to have pleaded for his life with that as material for negotiation—— He had not. Thus, he had received retribution.

Ram: "Those who wield the sword fall to the sword, those who cling to evil fall to evil, those who yield to fire fall to fire—— And, those who wish for the Oni fall to the Oni, destroyed by what they rely on."

——That was, the divine providence of retribution Ram placed her faith in.

Swinging her arm down, she let a long exhale.

Afterwards, Ram turned backwards, returning to the extensively ruined aisle. She could not have fought at close vicinity, so she had taken upon herself to be further distant.

A vexing sense of distance, hence Ram's gait spontaneously became restless.

???: "——Dodogyuuun."

Once she made her return by treading through the collapsed wall, what greeted Ram was the cry of a tall ground dragon.

That jet-black ground dragon had aptly maneuvered its body and concealed Rem's figure behind itself. Worst-case scenario, had the one to return not been Ram, then it perhaps intended to act like a shield or so.

Despite being in such a tattered state, for it to gallantly abide by Subaru's command, it was truly a ground dragon too good for Subaru——

Ram: "——No, that is incorrect. Did you also wish to protect Rem?"

Patrasche: "————"

Ram: "Yes… You truly are a good girl, Patrasche."

She softly caressed that ground dragon's neck.

It would also be necessary to immediately carry her wounded, injured self to the Green Room as well. Even the ground dragon who exemplified befitting loyalty, could not be made to strain itself with these injuries.

Neither did Ram wish to do anything preposterous to a person—— to the dragon who had been the benefactor of her younger sister.

Subsequently expressing her gratitude to the ground dragon, Ram made her way to Rem, who was being protected behind her.

The sharing of the horns' might by use of Synesthesia had already been undone, so no horn was present on her forehead. However, the recoil of having shouldered Ram's strength, commensurate with that of the Oni God, had definitely eaten into that body of hers.

Such that Ram herself felt heavy upon contemplating the recoil that surely would pay a call upon her soon. But——

Ram: "Right now, at this time, anything boorish cannot be thought of."

Gently kneeling down at her position, Ram positioned her hand onto the cheek of her perpetually slumbering younger sister.

The bond as sisters devoid of actual feeling, was now accompanied by a far greater certitude of actual feeling compared to before. She felt feelings of love, of cherishing, overflow.

With her horn broken off, having lost her might as the reincarnation of the Oni God, she had lived until today.

For what purpose had that night of blazes befallen, until now Ram had surmised it had befallen for the purpose of making her herself, neither did she consider that to be mistaken.

However, starting today and this moment, that had changed.

The reason why that day, Ram's horn had been broken off——

Ram: "——It was to realize, today, here, that Ram is Rem's nee-sama."

For she had been able to actually feel, with the contact between souls via Synesthesia, that they were twins who shared the same world, that they were irreplaceable elder and younger sisters.

Ram: "More than ever before, Ram wants to talk to you. What kind of a time, did you and Ram spend? What kind of a yesterday did you and Ram collect, let us replenish the lost reminiscences together."

Since time flowed without halt, however many reminiscences of the future can be mounded.

Thus, for everything to not fade remaining unknown, remaining unremembered, day after day, let us make flowers bloom in reminiscences as many times as need be.

Ram: "Let's converse lots, of what yesterday held."

The Sleeping Beauty would not respond.

Although, without letting her chest congeal upon her silence and instead fulfilling it with something warm, Ram smiled.

Whilst smiling, with no longer any qualms for her own emotions, she moved her lips.

Ram: "——Ram loves you, Rem."

Certainly, no matter how the time they had collected between the two of them had been, these emotions alone would not turn traitor.

Enigmatically, upon vocalizing what was identical to the last words of the distorted Sin Archbishop, though it was ultimately the same thing, it had not echoed the same.

Those who were unbeknownst to love, and those who lived in love, never could they never echo the same.

Never, could they echo the same.

Arc 6 Chapter 87 – Distant Regard

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 8 "——I Ask Thy Will", Parts 4-5

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo, Hedgehog) — Complete

Her head swayed from left to right rather violently.

She slowly came to notice someone was carrying her like luggage, and this someone was running as if their life depended on it.

Not that it was particularly her first time, being carried like this, no.

To say she was actually used to it would be an exaggeration. It would rather be much more apt to say that she had experienced being lugged around like a suitcase very often, though the fault for that lay in her partner, who had little consideration to spare for her.

???: "Stop shaking me so muuuch, Elsa…"

Regardless of how many times she came to request so, they would fall on deaf ears. Yet nevertheless, she found it hard to describe her relationship with her.

Calling her an accomplice or a partner was difficult, as this relationship lacked the foundation of trust required, and the two were nearly not close enough for her to call Elsa her sister or mother. Calling her a friend felt strange as that was definitely not what their relationship was like, but calling her an acquaintance was just as difficult as they were not strangers to one another.

So Meili had always sunk into deep thought over this. What kind of relationship had they truly had?

——What had Elsa seen herself as, to Meili?

Meili: "Come on, stop shaking me so muuuch…"

Voicing her complaints mattered little, but saying nothing at all felt like she had resigned herself, so she could let herself up either. Thus she kept speaking up, even if her words would not be heard—— Nay, she at least tried to speak up.

As if coating her words, some hot liquid flowed out of her mouth before she could speak. Her first thought was that her breakfast was flying out of her mouth, but that was incorrect.

It was blood, deep-red in color, gushing out from the depths of her tiny body.

Subaru: “She won’t stop bleeding, damnit! Beako! What should be done!?”

Beatrice: “For now! Just make sure she throws up whatever blood is in her throat completely, I suppose! Things will get much worse if she suffocates, in fact!”

Voices of a boy and a girl yelling at one another rung around her, then her body was abruptly tilted to her side. With a violent coughing fit, blood streamed unendingly from her throat and lips.

Something touched her lips, and the blood clotting in her throat was quickly sucked out. It was just in the nick of time, as air finally filled her lungs and rushed to her brain.

Subaru: “——Phew! Alright, she’s breathing again! Beako, hit her with some healing!”

Beatrice: “Understood, I suppose! But we can’t keep doing this over and over, in fact.”

Subaru: “I get that…! I pushed Meili too far, this is on me. I’ll pay my dues.”

Meili realized there was some shouting going on above her, but from the moment she could breathe, her mind and body became too heavy to make anything out.

No, that could not have been the case. She must have been tired all along. It was only that the body perceived that its biggest danger was gone, so her consciousness could finally focus on other functions. She could finally feel exactly how bad the damage she had incurred was.

Her hands and feet were limp, and her head spun. She had thrown up close to three cups’ worth of blood. She felt as if her entire body were ablaze, but she could pinpoint that the origin of those vicious flames was her back.

There was something wrong there, something very wrong with her entire back.

That was likely the reason why she was unable to move her body and was continually throwing up blood, she thought.

The two shouting on top of her, what she had been doing right before this, all of it was vague and foggy.

Yet, even in her world of fog and mist, she could make out something distinct. Indeed, that was——

Meili: “A… promise…”

She could make out the distinct silhouette of a promise, a promise she had exchanged with someone——

△▼△▼△▼△

——On the moment the titanic scorpion had changed its color, the light it had fired then was the greatest it had till now.

The swelling bright, white light scattered in all directions, turning numerous aflame Hungry Horse Kings aiming for its crimson hide to dust, sending ripples across the sea of sand.

Of course, neither Subaru nor Beatrice could avoid being caught up in the destruction, but Meili had bore the worst of it all.

Having to command the Witchbeasts had led her to overextend herself, so when the titanic scorpion—— when the Crimson Scorpion unleashed its counterattack, she had been caught within its vicious aftermath.

The only silver lining was she had escaped being skewered by needles of light. Should she have been so much as scraped by one, her tiny body would, assuredly, have been vaporized.

However, even if that had not come to pass, it still remained truth that she had been hit directly by a blast strong enough to part and ripple the sea of sand. That alone was enough to deal near-fatal damage.

Subaru: “Meili!!”

At the time Subaru and Beatrice rushed to get to her collapsed body on the sand, she had been in an awful state when. Perhaps because she had curled up at the last moment, the most major of her injuries were on her back.

With her black cloak blown off by the blast, her marred skin lay bare under burnt cloth. Faced with her charred and lacerated skin in front of his eyes, his vision wavered for a moment. However——

Subaru: “Am I an idiot!? What on earth am I here for!?”

Latching onto his consciousness with a balled fist, he called forth the power hidden within him.

Cor Leonis was already active—— the power that allowed him to shoulder the pains and burdens his companions felt, he increased its flow from Meili to him, allowing him to take on almost all of the pain Meili felt from her near-fatal injury.

Naturally, it would be unwise to take on all of her pain. If it were to cause him to collapse, the consequences would be unforeseeably great. Thus, he took on the greatest of portion he could manage without fainting but,

Subaru: “I’m still good… I can take it—— Right, Natsuki Subaru?”

Were it his previous self here, he would possibly have lost both his composure and his heart, ending in an unsightly show of disgrace.

However, Subaru understood well what it meant to go down the path of “Natsuki Subaru”. He knew what purpose his existence served, naturally, but he also knew there were some things he alone could accomplish. Therefore——

Subaru: “——Emilia-tan, and Julius seem to be doing just fine. Echidna, Patrasche and Rem seem to be safe too.”

He looked through the presence of his companions fighting their battles within the Tower, confirming to himself their statuses.

While Emilia's disappearance gnawed away at him, he also felt concern about Julius's status during his battle with Reid. Even Echidna and Patrasche's locations within the Tower filled him with anxiety, but in the end, he decided to put his faith in all of them.

Instead, he turned his attention to Ram, and to Meili, who lay right in front of his eyes.

Subaru: "——Kuh."

Immediately after Meili's burden of pain began flooding into him, Subaru groaned, his viscera on fire.

In truth, taking on Ram's strain was exhausting already. Taking on Meili's burden of near-death pain was akin to suicide.

Subaru: "This is bad…!"

He had thrown out his words with vigor, but could not find enough of it to push his limits further.

Thus it came down to him requiring to reduce the flow of burden from Ram to him, to take on more of Meili's pain, who was near-death.

Ram, being as sharp as she was, would likely be able to deduce his reasoning from that alone.

Subaru: "I'm definitely going to get yelled at later…"

Ram: "Ha! Look at you in this state, after saying such big things. You are Barusu, after all."

As that all-too-possible image of Ram flashed through his mind, Subaru endured the unpleasant, bitter taste of blood.

Even though Cor Leonis could only take on the mental, and not the physical burdens of others, the spread of the taste of death in his mouth was a sign the feedback was indeed affecting Subaru's body, rather than it being merely psychological.

The effect of the mind on the body was far greater than he had imagined.

He had heard before that should a person believe there was a hot iron rod pressed on their skin, burns would appear.

In other words, taking on Meili's excruciating pain meant he would experience it and his body would reproduce the source of that pain.

If he did not exercise caution, it could lead to the origin of two corpses with the same cause of death.

Subaru: "Yeah, I'd really like to avoid that——!"

He spat out what blood had accumulated in his mouth, then stood up with Meili's body on his shoulder. Then he ducked below a Hungry Horse King's flaming spear, running away as Beatrice shot a few arrows of purple to keep it at bay.

The Hungry Horse King that came attacking just now was the one Subaru and Beatrice had been riding on.

As soon as the situation took a turn for the worse, the Witchbeast had seen its chance in the chaos and betrayed its new comrades—— Not. It was simply that Meili's Divine Protection had worn off, resulting in the Witchbeast returning to its usual cold and bloodthirsty demeanor.

Without Meili's command, Witchbeasts were enemies of mankind, who would regard Subaru and everyone else as enemies.

Such Witchbeast lurked under the sea of sand in numbers uncountable.

Meili: "Hck!"

Subaru: "Meili!"

Meili vomited more blood as Subaru carried her around like loose luggage, desperately avoiding the lunging Witchbeasts. With her having a coughing fit as she retched blood, His frustration at the situation grew only more as he watched the color drain from Meili's face.

He had no leeway to settle down and heal her. And if this continued——

Subaru: "Shit! She won't stop bleeding! Beako! What should we do!?"

Beatrice: "Just-! For now, just make sure she throws up whatever blood is in her throat completely, I suppose! Things will get much worse if the blood clots there, in fact!"

Beatrice made sure none of the Witchbeasts dared come closer as she tried to keep up with Subaru's bigger strides with fervor alone. In that time, Subaru shook Meili, trying to get her to cough and expel all the blood in her throat.

However, Meili's complexion did not change, and the trickle of blood flowing out of her did not halt. With no other way out, Subaru curled his fist into a ball and pressed one end against her lips, then tried to suck the blood out of her throat through the other way.

Meili: "Hck! Geh-!"

Subaru: "——Phew! Alright, she's breathing again! Beako, hit her with some healing!"

Beatrice: "Understood, I suppose! But we can't keep doing this over and over, in fact."

Subaru: "I get that…! I pushed Meili too far, this is on me. I'll pay my dues."

Though to be precise, Subaru had already begun paying his dues for his mistake.

Even after he stopped taking a part of the burden he had been taking from Ram, he was beginning to turn pale himself.

It would all depend on how much more time he could get this way——

Subaru: "No, this is where I got to push harder. Can't even call myself a man if I can't…"

Beatrice: "Uhya! I suppose!"

Subaru: "Ohh!?"

His teeth clenched, Subaru ran with Meili in his arm as the effects of his Authority spread throughout his body. At that moment, Beatrice suddenly jumped and latched onto his head.

Startled at this unexpected event, but regardless Subaru ended up giving Beatrice an awkward piggyback. Of course, Beatrice weighed as much as a ball of cotton, so that did not hinder his escape——

Subaru: "Bea——"

Beatrice: “Subaru, stop trying to shoulder everything by yourself, in fact. We are *aikata*, Subaru and Betty both. Meili is our friend too, I suppose. Subaru, you’re not the only one who wishes to help, in fact.”

Subaru: “————”

Pressing her tiny hands on Subaru’s head, Beatrice softly voiced her appeal.

With Subaru becoming silent after hearing that, Beatrice moved her hand across towards Meili and cast her gentle healing magic—— Slowly, warm light filled her body, and in proxy, Subaru’s as well.

Beatrice too was concerned for her friends. He could feel her emotions come through the warm light.

???: “————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!”

Subaru: “————”

Behind them, the Witchbeasts continued their battle against each other.

Fortunately, even with Meili’s Divine Protection having worn off, it seemed the Hungry Horse Kings had no desire to make peace with the Crimson Scorpion immediately. Same went for all the other Witchbeasts.

The Crimson Scorpion’s giant pincers and long tail all smashed away half of the Witchbeasts that stood between it and Subaru’s group.

Then again, the other half was aiming for him, so there was still no time for rest.

Subaru: “What other choice do I even——”

Truth be told, it was not as if he had no other choice.

While there was no way to emerge victorious immediately, he could indeed make use of Beatrice’s wish to help Meili to improve his chances.

However, he hesitated to carry it out, because he did not know whether it would be possible to put it into practice without trying it, and because the inspiration for that technique had come from the worst of the worst. But——

Beatrice: “Subaru! If your concern for Betty is why you’re hesitating, then don’t, I suppose! If Betty isn’t the reason, then we can go apologize to them later, together, in fact!”

Subaru: “————”

Beatrice: “Betty wants to share in your pain, in your joy… Don’t leave Betty out! That was one of the clauses in our Contract, I suppose!”

Subaru did not know what expression she had seen on his face, but Beatrice exploded with anger regardless.

Because she was riding on top of his head, he could not see her expression. However, he could tell, that even if she was puffed up with anger she, this little girl he proudly called his partner, looked adorable.

Precisely because of that, her words offered Subaru the courage he needed, spoiling him.

He had no room for hesitation.

His very reason for his hesitation, his partner herself had declared there was no need. Henceforth——

Subaru: “I love you, Beako.”

Beatrice: “Betty loves you more than that, in fact.”

Once they expressed each other’s affections, Subaru gently laid Meili on the ground.

In his heart, he decided he would, at no cost, allow this life to be lost——

Subaru: “——Cor Leonis, Second Shift.”

Bestowing a new name onto what he himself had christened “Lion’s Heart”, he changed gears within himself.

By doing so, he amplified the effect of the Authority that exerted itself on him, the Little King—— He, had been scolded for being a King who carried the burdens of his subjects, all alone.

Having said that, this was not as shameless as the Greed of pushing one's burdens onto another.

Therefore, what Subaru desired as a result of his Authority—— what Subaru desired was to share his burdens, together with those who stood alongside him.

In other words——

Subaru: "Second Shift—— Division of Labor."

The burdens that Subaru alone carried with his whole body, he could now share them with his comrades

And at this place, at present——

Beatrice: "——Subaru."

Subaru: "Yeah?"

Beatrice: "…This is incredibly taxing, I suppose!!"

Subaru: "Well, yeah, it's super taxing!!"

With that, the second level of Cor Leonis was activated, and the burden he carried was shared with Beatrice.

Half would not do. He could only spare half of that half, but even so, that alone made the load on Subaru much lighter. On the other hand, Beatrice's face turned pale as she took on the burden he shared.

She yelled to mask her pain, and Subaru returned her thought the same way.

It was taxing. It was painful. He wanted to stop right away.

To hell with playing pretend King, taking on everyone's burdens—— Therefore, this Little King could stand up, only because there were others willing to support him in his endeavors.

Subaru: "By the way, this pain I'm splitting…"

Beatrice: “————”

Subaru: “I won’t give you that much, I’m very sorry.”

Having shared his burden with Beatrice, Subaru turned his attention to the Crimson Scorpion as Beatrice continued treating Meili from his back.

Its true identity was Shaula, even now he could feel his existence connected to hers through Cor Leonis. Through a faint, but large light.

Yet unfortunate as it was, Subaru could not simply dump the burden he and Beatrice shared and carried onto the Crimson Scorpion—— Likely because it possessed neither the will to wish for, nor accept that burden.

Only those who wished to support this Little King could share in his burden.

Indeed, a truly easy-to-understand, inflexible power. For that reason, he could not become too full of Pride.

Because he would never forget that he could stand straight only because there was someone there, supporting him.

Subaru: “Beako! Think while your hands are doing other things!”

Beatrice: “——Hk, that’s too tall an order, in fact!!”

He had requested for her hands to tend to Meili, healing her, while her mind would race to think on what to do next to escape their precarious situation. Because, the Crimson Scorpion’s tail had lit aglow once more with white light, its malice aimed at Subaru’s party——

Beatrice: “——E · M · M!!”

His one-time trump card, their magic of absolute invincibility, was flushed away, and the subsequent shockwave swallowed the three whole.

△▼△▼△▼△

——The happenings below the clouds were not conveyed to Emilia, who was above the clouds.

But, identical to her comrades fighting with their lives on the line, upon finally passing through a fierce battle, Emilia had finally stepped foot in that place.

Emilia: "————"

She had made her way to the uppermost stratum of Pleiades Watchtower, further above the First Floor, the summit in the truest sense.

In the location she had reached via the sacrifice of multiple ice warriors, what Emilia had laid her eyes upon at the base of the central pillar—— was a black Monolith, positioned there.

The Monolith itself appeared to be identical to the one she had seen during the course of the Third Floor's Examination.

What was different was that the Monolith was not levitating, and the presence of an eye-catching feature at its surface, which was supposed to be completely flat. That was——

Emilia: "Someone's, handprints?"

Having rounded her amethyst eyes, in Emilia's field of vision were multiple handprints imprinted onto its surface—— six in total, handprints of differing men and women.

It could be understood by the size of the palms or the thickness of the fingers, that all of them were hands of different humans.

But since those personages had gone out of their way to leave their handprints together like this, it was unmistakable that they were on close terms with each other and were people connected to this Watchtower——

Emilia: "…Could it be Shaula's Master, or Reid?"

That was all Emilia could think of, when she pondered about people connected to the Watchtower.

Volcanica was also present, but the handprints present here all belonged to humans, so it did not seem that any of his traces as a Dragon had been left behind.

Thus, Emilia could think of only two amongst six of the people concerning the handprints.

Emilia: "——? Wait, this is?"

Having thought that far, Emilia felt a sense of discomfort by one of the handprints.

Amidst the six handprints, there was one as positioned slightly at one end—— though next to it was a handprint of approximately the same size, the two handprints positioned at one end were evidently smaller.

Perhaps because solely these two were handprints of women.

And, what had drawn Emilia's attention was one of the handprints, that being——

Emilia: "This handprint, is mine…?"

Whilst furrowing her eyebrows, Emilia whispered as she looked down onto her right hand.

Though that would be odd, she did not feel it to be so. It seemed one of the handprints printed on this Monolith was her own.

Emilia: "————"

Inhaling a deep breath, Emilia faced the Monolith. And in order to dispel her misgivings, she reached for that handprint with her own right hand——

???: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

Emilia: "——Hk! It came back!"

An instant prior to her touching the Monolith, Emilia turned towards the unsparing voice descending from above.

And once she did, what she saw was Volcanica flapping his wings, descending and positioning itself on the uppermost stratum, having agonized tempestuously after having the white scale on his throat touched by Emilia's ice warrior.

Volcanica: *"————"*

Facing her back towards the Monolith, Emilia once again confronted the Divine Dragon.

The battle to climb the pillar had been immensely arduous, but if it were to be resumed here then she would be forced into an intense struggle. This place was spacious in itself, but the uppermost stratum's space was narrower than that of the First Floor, making it difficult for her to scuffle.

Emilia: "Also, it'll be reaaally problematic if the Monolith gets broken…"

The Monolith's durability was unknown.

When she had encountered the Monolith on the Third Floor as well, she had been stopped from striking it by Julius and Ram, so its tenacity remained unclear.

However, no matter how sturdily should it be built, Emilia did not believe it could safely withstand a blow by the might of the Divine Dragon.

Emilia: "If you hit it, it'll surely break. So——!"

I can't let you do so, and conceiving that thought, Emilia summoned seven soldiers of ice in her environs yet again.

The ice warriors had been thoroughly shattered in her way to reach the uppermost stratum, but identical to Emilia, their expressions were brimming with determination, reassuring.

Matching in with them as they wielded weapons of ice, Emilia held two ice swords in her hands.

And, in unity with the seven ice warriors, she plunged into Volcanica.

Emilia: "Let's go, everyone! Volcanica has a weakness in its white part of the neck."

Since it had displayed such a vehement reaction, that white scale was Volcanica's weakness.

Though she did not wish to go so far as to wound it, should someone reach merely for touching it, Emilia would be able to obtain time for examining the Monolith——

Emilia: "——Eh?"

The subsequent instant, Emilia spilled her voice upon the gyrating reversal of her above and below.

Emilia: “————”

Far too sudden for her to judge what had occurred.

There was merely a nimble sensation of contact at her feet, having priorly stepped ahead in order to advance. That too, so faint that she had noticed its touch only after being turned upside down.

And, along with that——

Emilia: “Ah.”

The seven ice warriors in Emilia’s environs, who had been turned upside down, shattered instantaneously.

All of them had solely their heads shattered with skill, transforming to Mana, unable to resist. By the point of having sensed that by her skin, Emilia took notice with a shudder.

This just now, had been Volcanica’s tail.

Volcanica’s tail had swiftly swept Emilia’s legs, and that very same tail had smashed the heads of the ice warriors.

Her throat froze upon comprehending that a singular swift whip by the tail had realized that.

This was in an entirely different league from the surprise attack Emilia had managed to guard against in an instant.

If Subaru’s whip counted for one, then Volcanica’s tail whip counted for a thousand or ten thousand, such was the margin of difference.

Even Emilia would have been mercilessly defeated before that enormous attack.

Thus, she held a doubt.

Emilia: “Why, did he go soft on me…?”

For Emilia he had swept her legs, for the ice warriors he had shattered their heads.

What was the identity of the difference? It could not have been that he had retaliated against them because they possessed faces identical to what had earlier touched his white scale. That seemed improbable.

Having thought far, Emilia remembered she had not escaped from the circumstance of having been turned upside down.

Emilia: “Oh n——!”

As she was, she was about to slam headfirst onto the floor.

Once again Emilia’s legs, who was midair having been turned upside down, were struck with a soft impact from the side,

Emilia: “Uwah…!”

Halfway reversed from being upside down, Emilia made a dangerous landing.

And, having raised her face, she made an expression that conveyed she had been in danger——

Volcanica: “What art thou doing.”

Pronouncing so was the form of the Divine Dragon, his face pointing toward Emilia’s gaze.

Emilia: “Umm…?”

That was quite literally ahead of her eyes and nose.

So close that should Emilia inch her face forward even a little, she would touch that rock-hard robust skin and nose.

For the Dragon’s face to be at this distance itself was enough to astonish Emilia.

However, what bewildered Emilia furthermore was——

Emilia: “You’re saying, something different from what you had been constantly repeating earlier!”

Volcanica: “————”

Emilia: “Did you return to sanity? Then, can you talk about some stuff? Like about the Examination, or about changing the established rules of this Watchtower, there’s a lot of stuff I need to discuss…”

Emilia vocalized rapidly, having descried hope in Volcanica’s condition.

If the Divine Dragon whom she thought had become senile had been restored, she could once again converse regarding the Examination. Hence, it would not be necessary for her to forcefully resort to violent measures.

Emilia: “Hey, please! Speak…”

Volcanica: “What would happen should thou tumble. Should that perchance happen, I would be the one to accept reprimand… Since, everyone bows before thee.”

Emilia: “Volcanica…?”

Anxious about the circumstances of everyone within the Tower, Emilia desperately implored, while Volcanica once again pronounced words that were not a repetition.

However, as the content did not seem to correspond as being a response to Emilia’s words, her bewilderment augmented.

However, dwelling in Volcanica’s golden eyes as it gazed at Emilia, was a calm hue.

Unlike the ambiguity akin to vacuum from just before, it had the light of emotion.

Gently, calmly, he intently gazed at Emilia as though with affection——

Volcanica: “To where have Flugel and Reid gone? It would be lonesome for Shaula, without even any words of parting. Farsale too, would kick up such a racket.”

Emilia: “————”

With his tender eyes maintaining his gaze at her, Volcanica resumed its words.

What the Dragon had recited with a regard of viewing something distant, were the names of Flugel and Reid, along with Shaula, followed by one more person——

Though it could not be distinctly ascertained whom that was unless the family name was also asked, Emilia had remembrance of that echo. If that, Farsale, was as Emilia remembered.

Emilia: “Farsale, you mean, Farsale Lugunica? The King from four-hundred years ago?”

That was a personage whose name would be brought up on countless instances in books she had studied for the Royal Selection.

Farsale Lugunica—— the thirty-fifth King of the Kingdom of Lugunica, and the great man who had ruled the country four-hundred years prior, during the era of the Witch.

And, having forged the Covenant with none other than the Divine Dragon Volcanica, the Last Lion King had etched the first step of longstanding prosperity of the Kingdom of Lugunica.

Emilia: “————”

Emilia immediately turned her gaze towards the Monolith behind.

The handprints of six people—— if Volcanica’s words were not unrelated, then could three of the people of the handprints be Flugel, Reid, and Farsale. The remaining three people were unknown, but one, though unconfirmed, seemingly matched Emilia’s handprint.

The remaining ones were of a man and woman each, likely.

Emilia: “Then, could the woman’s handprint be Shaula’s…?”

That seemed to be the likeliest as a possibility.

The identity of the final male handprint was unknown, but something of the sort would be enough to make her calm down. As ever, the greatest issue at present was the fact that present there was a handprint of her own, which she was unfamiliar with——

Emilia: “Could it be, I… have forgotten about something, aside from Mother and everyone else from the Forest!?”

As she started to question it, Emilia realized she herself had a past wherein she had lidded her memories by herself.

Even regardless of so, she was aware that due to the existence of the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Memories and Names could become a complete mess.

Could it perhaps be that though Emilia had once casually come here and imprinted her handprint, she had now simply forgotten about it?

Emilia: "…No, whatever circumstance may it be, that can't be the case. Though if Puck were here, I could've somehow gotten to know if I had come here."

Volcanica: "——What happened? Any worries?"

Emilia: "Ah, um, I'm alright. Thank you for worrying. Thank you, but…"

Ultimately, sensing the dialogue established with Volcanica to be a dodgy one, Emilia was left in a bind.

It was far better than being hammered by its tail or forelimbs without conversation, but the situation of stalemate pertaining to the Examination remained the same.

Emilia pondered, just what should she do——

Volcanica: "If something is the matter then speak up. If it is thy distress, then I shalt take it away ——Satella."

——Referred to as such, she inhaled.

"____"

Satella, this was not her first time being referred to as so.

Silver hair, amethyst eyes, and being a half-elf—— those were the traits Emilia possessed, and upon looking at her, copious humans living in this world would associate her with the existence identical to her.

What remained, was simply the difference of what it ought to be called.

Some called it Satella, some called it the worst calamity, some called it the Witch of Envy.

Thus, someone referring to Emilia as such was no surprise.

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Floating (source)

However, what was mysterious was that Volcanica had called Satella's name with deep affection.

After all, the trio of Volcanica, Reid and Flugel, the last one whom had shoved his own achievements onto Shaula, were the ones who had originally sealed Satella, referred to as the Witch of Envy.

Then why would it, towards her——

Emilia: "Why, would you speak to the Witch of Envy with kindness?"

Doing so genuinely, she questioned that way of referring to her somewhat indiscreetly.

To name it as stimulation for the present Emilia would be quite stringent, but at the very least, when viewing the situation objectively, she realized this single phrase had become the origin.

Or perhaps, both "Satella" or "Witch of Envy" could have been adequate.

Some called her Satella, some called her the worst calamity, some called her the Witch.

And, Emilia had referred to her as the Witch of Envy. That was——

Volcanica: "——Witch of Envy."

——Alteration was yielded in Volcanica's distant regard.

Volcanica's golden eyes, the change born therein was dramatic.

Without moving, the Dragon's head staring at Emilia was immediately ahead of her eyes and nose. Henceforth, capturing the extent of that alteration from up-close, Emilia felt chills run through her entire body.

She had a hunch, that the change was an unfavorable one.

Having been raised in forests, Emilia possessed the experience points named as having grown amongst the wild. She had seen countless animals and Witchbeasts completely change in situations such as this one.

Abiding by that intuition, Emilia jumped backward as though she had been flicked away.

That had been the correct answer.

Emilia: "——Hk."

That instant, the air before Emilia's eyes burst open.

Not an exaggeration, quite literally, the space constricted, then subsequently became swollen and burst open.

The phenomenon of unknown principle was peculiar as though space itself had rolled over, and had she been in its location she would have been mangled, regardless of how powerful a defense she put up.

And, it had occurred on the location Emilia's head had been.

Had Emilia been even a fraction of a moment late in lowering her head, she would have died.

After having climbed up to the top of the Tower, Emilia had been in countless near-death experiences, such as the tail whip and the twisting of space just now.

She had perhaps never been in a situation wherein her life was endangered as much as this one.

Emilia: "But, since everything is working out, that may mean I reaaally can pull it off."

If the element of fate being her ally was letting Emilia live, then even every single breath Emilia was taking was the boon of good fortune, she positively interpreted the situation so.

Should she not do so, she would start losing heart due to the subsequent changes in the situation. Because——

Volcanica: "——Satella."

Having spread his wings once again, Volcanica was directing definite animosity towards this side.

Observing that, Emilia responded to the desire to stamp her feet. Just after she had thought Volcanica had seemingly returned to lucidity, it had now regressed.

In fact, unlike his earlier seemingly half-asleep state, he appeared to have greater determination than when it had been senile.

Emilia: "——Icicle Line."

Thus, Emilia liberated her magical strength with determined conviction, without holding back.

The atmosphere icily fissured, and slowly gave rise to white haze. Though this was still the uppermost stratum of the Watchtower located above the clouds, it glaciated the world in white.

Making sound, what were slowly generated were arms of ice—— Pulling out lances as they stood on the floor, slowly turning around, Emilia faced forward.

Once again, she had prepared to battle against Volcanica.

However, if the strike which had swept Emilia's legs had been a serious gambol on Volcanica's behalf, then she did not know if she would be able to deal with this previous attack.

Strength in an entirely different league compared to when it had been senile—— no, it seemed to be senile even now.

Emilia: "But…"

Staring into the opponent's golden eyes straight ahead, Emilia could not label Volcanica's attitude as simply being senile.

After all, Volcanica's eyes were brimming with sadness, bitterness.

Volcanica: "Satella, indeed, Satella. We must stop thee, who hast been reduced to the Witch of Envy."

Emilia: "…Were you close friends?"

Volcanica: "That day, I should not have hesitated. That day, had I not hesitated, everyone would have——"

No response to her question.

However, Volcanica's trembling voice itself seemed as though the answer.

The lamenting Dragon took a deep inhale, and once again came the breath that scorched the world white.

Prior to that, Emilia must step ahead and strike that white scale. Should she not do so, Emilia, and naturally, everyone else as well would be beyond saving.

Emilia: "——Subaru, Beatrice, Ram, Rem, Meili, Patrasche-chan, Echidna, Julius, Anastasia-san."

She thought of everyone who had come to this Tower, and had suffered.

Everyone whom she must save, everyone who had their sights set on the same goal as her.

By doing so, unknown strength welled up in the depths of Emilia's chest.

Volcanica: "——Witch of Envy, Satella!!"

Emilia: "——No, that's wrong. I'm the Witch of Glaciation of the Great Forest of Elior, Emilia."

Whilst bathing her entire body in the welling strength, Emilia responded with a loud voice to the Divine Dragon, who seemed to be misunderstanding her with someone she was apparently similar to.

Let the opponent be the Divine Dragon or whatever—— Emilia had everyone by her side. Thus——

Emilia: "Even if just my name, remember it properly, okay!"

——The final stage enclosed on Pleiades Watchtower, as a light erupted simultaneously below and above the clouds.

Arc 6 Chapter 88 - ——I Ask Thy Will

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 8 "——I Ask Thy Will", Parts 6-8

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Witch Cult Translations (Ringo) — Complete

——Below the clouds, it happened approximately at the same time as a light broke out above the clouds.

The two battlefields parted by thick clouds, and most of all, a great distance, should there be anyone who could observe the both of them at the same time, then that would be nobody but an outside spectator to the world.

The battles for the capture of the Pleiades Watchtower, were finally entering their finale. That situation was——

Subaru: "WHOAAAAA——!!"

The struck ground of sand imploded, and amidst the clouds of dust and shockwaves, Subaru shouted at the top of his lungs.

The destructive force assailing upon his entire body possessed excessive might that could splinter him into fragments. Yet, the reason why Subaru had not been reduced to pieces——

Beatrice: "——E · M · M!!"

One of the three original magic spells Subaru and Beatrice had devised.

To be given a broad explanation, it was magic of absolute defense, of the kind that stopped the flow of time of Subaru and Beatrice's flesh bodies, which would thus take no external effect.

Subaru: “We got so hyped when we first devised it, but because the guy who used a similar ability was just the worst, whenever it’s used it feels like using a last resort for survival that I’d never otherwise use!”

Beatrice: “That issue has already been spoken about, in fact! Betty has already decided to close her eyes, I suppose!”

Hearing Subaru’s cries, Beatrice, being lugged on his shoulder, yelled so.

The ability of “invincibility” held by the Sin Archbishop of Greed[310], Regulus Corneas, was potent might befitting of being labelled as being backward compatible with this E · M · M. Though its user had been the worst, its practical usage was outstanding, at a level which they should be aiming for, yet a territory they did not wish to reach.

Subaru: “That’d mean having a guy who’s nauseating to even think of, as reference…!”

Living by eating experiences, was something he had heard oftentimes.

Finding that by itself reminiscent of the Sin Archbishops of Gluttony, thinking of them as a bunch who would pose as obstacles in all ways left and right, Subaru found himself fed up with it from the bottom of his heart.

But without that, it would not be possible for him to protect himself, or Beatrice and Meili in the first place.

Meili: “——Ah.”

Mumbling incoherently, with eyes closed, Meili breathed softly in Subaru’s arms.

Her face writhed in pain, but at the very least, she could breathe. Subaru could feel the pain flowing into him lessen bit-by-bit. It was a sign Beatrice’s magic was working as intended. And at this rate, things would certainly start to look better. Hopefully. Probably.

[310] Truth be told, the Japanese does say, very literally, “Sin Archbishop of the Witch of Greed” (『強欲の魔女』の大罪司教), but that is almost-one-hundred-percent wrong, and a brainfart from Tappei.

Beatrice: “It’s extremely difficult to keep both E · M · M and my healing magic up, in fact! If it weren’t for Betty, all three of us would be dead by now, I suppose!”

Subaru: “I know! It’s just that…”

As he felt gratitude for Beatrice’s scolding, Subaru looked into himself.

He had nothing he was able to do aside from clenching his molars and holding back the pain. However, the main problem was his Mana—— In the first place, Subaru had no choice but to be Beatrice’s magic tank. Despite that, he had as much Mana as the average person, probably less due to being a failure in magic.

Using E · M · M like this, was akin to becoming a filled Mana bucket with holes poked in it. At this rate, either E · M · M or Beatrice’s healing would stop. And so,

Subaru: “There’s no way we can stop Meili’s healing…!”

Beatrice: “Then we have no choice but to turn off E · M · M, in fact. You’re in charge of dealing with the timing and what happens after, I suppose!”

Subaru: “Aw yeah, leave it to me. And I hope you’ll continue to treat Meili, then do as I say just as I say it, like the good little Spirit you are, Beako!”

Beatrice: “You! Are! Horrible! In fact!”

They bickered, then exchanged glances and released E · M · M simultaneously—— At the same time, they jumped out of their spot and retreated.

And right at their heels, hot in pursuit, were the Crimson Scorpion and the horde of Witchbeasts. Even as they fought each other, they had their eye on Subaru.

As per the norm, he was massively handicapped, unable to go far from the Tower, and especially in how his target was still that Crimson Scorpion.

Should this continue, worst-case scenario was that——

Subaru: “——The Witch will…”

The mere mention of Return by Death would trigger a release of Miasma from him, making the Witchbeasts to focus on him—— As a man with little to show, this was a method he relied on often.

He was already in a dangerous spot, but on the off-chance the Crimson Scorpion would remain fixated on him as it had been, he could use this card to force the Witchbeasts and the Scorpion to begin fighting each other more violently.

However, the risk of collateral was too high.

Should Beatrice, Meili and Subaru fall, at the very least, Ram would too shortly after, due to Subaru carrying most of her burden on his own body.

Through Cor Leonis's power, all involved were stuck on the same boat. It was puzzling how Regulus had managed to lead such a lonely life despite being the owner of an Authority of this sort.

???: "————"

Subaru: "——Hk! E · M · T!!"

On the limits of his worthless thoughts, he sensed a future of the luster's blast and being evaporated away, thus Subaru parched his throat upon the premonition of Death and activated the second of his original magic.

E · M · T eliminated E · M · M's disadvantage of immobility, an anti-magic which successfully negated all kinds of magic head-on—— in principle, as long as it was something fired whilst tinged with Mana, there was nothing this magic could not negate. However——

Subaru: "I ended up using our trump card just five seconds after calling off E · M · M!"

Too pathetic to even be called pathetic, rather than that, he continued to lose all means of striking next, and had been wholly and seriously cornered.

Continuing to aim for Subaru and the rest, the tail stinger of the Crimson Scorpion, the flames of the Hungry Horse Kings, along with the variety of other Witchbeasts all attacked towards them, seeking to reduce them to cinders.

Inhaling, Subaru stiffened his body. He must use the third and final of his original magic or they would not be able to break through this situation. However, that one had not been perfected yet.

Should he fail, then there lied the possibility of the result being the three of them drifting in imaginary space——

Subaru: “I don’t trust myself enough, to gamble on some last moment awakening——!”

Even if he had admitted Natsuki Subaru to be a pretty great guy, he did not blindly believe he was some super guy capable of breaking through any situation whatsoever.

He was bad at giving up, simply that. Even if he were held down, he would simply stand up a greater number of times. In other words, that meant he was often held down as well.

Subaru: “This is no place to show how much of a habitual loser I am. Though it’s an unfavorable gamble…”

???: “——You claim to be able to manage through simple obstinacy and appearances? Though that too, is truly a decision befitting of yourself.”

It was the instant Subaru had determined he had no choice but to test it out.

An abrupt voice descended from overhead, and a shadow slipped into the space between the attacks and Subaru’s group. It was far too dazzling, so much so that Subaru subconsciously closed his eyes.

Without metaphors, it truly was dazzling—— Because, the shadow was gleaming in the hues of a rainbow.

???: “——Al Clauseria.”

The next instant, against the assailing strikes, a light that slashed down the lights was fired.

Shockwaves of destruction, scorching flames, a blitz with the life on the line. A black light declined them all, overflowing waters swallowed them all, the whipped-up sandstorm averted the energy.

A deed of controlling nature in the truest sense, and the one to perform this deed was someone with an elegant back who had landed atop the sand, having swung a long, slender Knight’s sword——

???: “——There were certain circumstances, so I rushed my way here. It seems that was a precarious position.”

Pronouncing so, turning towards Subaru was, of course, the Finest of Knights, Julius Juukulius.

Even with his outfit tainted by blood and sand at multiple spots, he stood there calmly.

Clad in the radiance of rainbow, his standing form was more graceful than ever before.

His gallant arrival made Subaru’s voice quiver as he said “Julius…”,

Subaru: “You… I’d sent you a message asking you to go help in other dangerous situations once you were done!”

Julius: “Yes, I did hear so. Hence, I came here. I’m sorry, but even when compared to all others, I judged this place to be the most dangerous.”

Subaru: “Shut up! What’s with that wound on your face! What about Reid!?”

Julius: “I was utterly defeated. He entirely took his leave with his victory.”

Subaru: “So damn laaame! You should’ve just won, then! We would’ve died if you hadn’t come here, so I’ll say it only once, but thanks!”

Hearing gratitude mixed within harsh words, Julius laughed with a “Heh”, a white scar below his left eye having been formed.

An irritating attitude, but it seemed he had finished his battle against Reid by himself and gained something for himself. Its proof——

Subaru: “Did you reconcile with your Quasi Spirits?”

Julius: “To be precise, those girls bloomed from being buds and gained the sublimity of Spirits. Also, to say we reconcile would not be adequate either. Since there never was any discord between us.”

Encircling the smiling Julius’s surroundings were six Quasi Spirits—— no, Spirits whose illumination had been augmented.

Upon his Name being plundered by the Authority of Gluttony, the connection between them had also vanished. The Spirits had followed him without lending any strength, their turmoil lasting for long.

However, with both sides' trenches filled, they reared a bond greater than before.

Smartly rebinding the Contract with the six Spirits, had been an outrageously transparent play.

Subaru: "Meanwhile I've got my hands full just hitting on Beako, you're a damn bastard who's hard to swallow."

Julius: "Regrettably, I have been swallowed before."

Subaru: "That's not funny! You're acting a bit too clearheaded, you know!?!?"

Subaru's eyes rounded, seeing Julius turn even his experience of the tragic ruin brought by the Authority into humor.

Since that he had used the phrasing "taking his leave with his victory", then he must have settled things with Reid. Since Reid's flesh body was supposed to belong to Roy Alphard, then it would be natural to think he had concluded matters with one part of Gluttony.

And, the fact that Julius had not alluded to that potential hazard meant that they had succeeded in incapacitating Alphard, unmistakably.

Beatrice: "Julius! You arrived at just the right time, I suppose! Lend Qua, in fact!"

Julius: "——Understood."

Julius instantly bowed at Beatrice's call. He also judged in a moment what Meili's condition, who was in Subaru's arms, was.

From the six Spirits, he projected ahead the Spirit that governed water, the blue Qua, and its tender power poured healing Mana into Meili's body along with Beatrice's magic. On top of that——

Julius: "So there is a need for me to buy time."

Subaru: “Yeah, as you can see. Shaula’s going ham after turning red but, you think you can do it? Didn’t you just lose to a red dude?”

Julius: “To express the intent to make up for a loss due to that reason, would be a discourteous attitude towards a lady.”

Avowing to confront head-on, Julius braced his Knight’s sword and confronted the Crimson Scorpion—— Shaula.

The compound eyes, though, showed no will before the Knight’s form. Its intent to murder was still directed towards Subaru, anything in-between were mere hindering obstacles.

That was its attitude toward the Spirit Knight, Julius, who had elevated himself to a level greater.

Julius: “Subaru, I shall handle Miss Shaula. Anything other than that…”

Subaru: “You’re gonna say, handle it by yourself, yeah, got it.”

Julius: “No, cooperate with Beatrice-sama and succeed.”

Subaru: “About seventy-percent of everything I can do in these situations counts on Beako, you know.”

Quite frankly, even seventy-percent was a very ostentatious number.

It would be around eighty-percent or ninety-percent, what Subaru could take pride in, as Beatrice’s Contractor, amounted only to a shrewd mind and a number of petty, foxy tricks, so even ninety-five-percent would not be a strange figure. Regardless——

Subaru: “You’re a lifesaver for coming back…”

Julius: “You too, seem to have reevaluated your own worth, which delights me more than anything.”

With a close exchange, Subaru and Julius focused on their respective duties.

In order to make sure none of the Witchbeasts’ attacks reached Subaru et al, Julius advanced ahead and exposed his own self to the rain of blades and abated damage in his rear.

On the other hand, Subaru kept Meili away from the damage being done by the Witchbeasts and concentrated on buying time until the condition for their victory was fulfilled, while she remained on the verge of death.

Subaru: “——Hk.”

A sensation of astonishment, Subaru lifted his face as if it had been flicked away.

The reason laid on the Pleiades Watchtower, on an anomaly that had occurred inside it. It was——

Subaru: “——Ram’s response, disappeared?”

△▼△▼△▼△

——The breath Volcanica had let loose, swooped down upon the uppermost stratum in the form of azure light.

Emilia: “————”

Emilia blocked it using the shield of ice created with all her might, seeking to break through.

During the journey through the sand sea up to Pleiades Watchtower, she had utilized shields of ice for bearing the brunt of the rain of coronas showered upon them from the Tower, but it failed to last even a moment before the Dragon’s breath.

The multi-layered ice shields melted instantly, and the attack, which Emilia had been hoping would be weakened however slightly, meaning she would be golden, rained upon her.

Emilia: “————”

For but a moment, the black Monolith at the back of Emilia’s mind came up.

Perhaps it was firm enough to remain unaffected by the Dragon’s breath. However, on the other hand, she was concerned that the Examination may be ruined should it get broken.

On top of that, this was a thought unrelated to breaking through the Examination, but,

Emilia: “If it gets broken, that’d be reaaally miserable…”

Handprints which yielded an odd sense of *déjà vu* had been left behind on the Monolith.

Just what connection did it have to herself, or was she perhaps simply overthinking it? However, she wished to ascertain the identity of that sensation.

That was why, she could not lose it. So that she could not lose the possibility.

Emilia: “————”

She converged as much Mana as miraculously possible and evolved it into Icicle Line.

Though Emilia possessed Mana enough to surprise even her own self, she could not manipulate those vast amounts of Mana all at once.

Regardless of how much Mana there was within her, the quantity she could bring forth at once solely amounted to the capacity of her Gate.

Yet Emilia boasted output more than ten times that of an ordinary magician, but the forte of having lived many years as a Spiritual Arts User further expanded her potential.

Magicians utilized the Mana stockpiled within themselves and through their Gates meddled with the world.

Spiritual Arts Users utilized the Mana in the atmosphere and borrowed the strength of Spirits to meddle with the world.

And, possessing groundings in both of these, Emilia was capable of doing both.

Though the amount of water capable of coming out of a tap was fixed, should that water be stored in a bucket, even greater quantities of water could be used. Emilia executed this using her own flesh body and the world.

Halting the Mana overflowing from her within in the outside world, and utilizing maximal magic heedless of her Gate——

Emilia: “——Absolute Zero.”

That was what Subaru had named it[311], speaking empty theories on how its materialization would perhaps be arduous.

It was enough to end a real battle with a single blow; that point in time, or thereabouts, was around the same timing as Subaru had exclaimed it to be miraculously unbelievable, therefore Emilia had entered into a contest she had never once succeeded in.

And, she would make it succeed.

If Emilia’s ordinary magical power was to be taken as having a value of “one”, then the potency of this magic which utilized the overflown power and materialized, would be close to “ten” or even possibly “a hundred”.

Instantly, a white vacuum swept over the world, accompanied with such strength that even the impossible-to-halt flow of time would be halted, a phenomenon impossible of being described as meagerly as the atmosphere being frozen.

Even the breath of the Dragon, which was supposed to be inevitable Death, was no exception.

Azure light and absolute null clashed head-on, their collision yielding a vacuum in the world.

Emilia: “————”

That moment, the two maximal potencies, with not the slightest delay, opposed and extinguished each other.

A truly astounding annihilation, accompanied by no sound or impact; and once the time that had supposedly been halted began to flow anew, Emilia readied an ice lance and flew forth.

Emilia: “HI, YAAAAAAA——!!”

[311] As you may imagine, Absolute Zero is written in Engrish (アブソリュート・ゼロ), much like Ice Brand Arts (アイスブランド・アーツ) and Icicle Line (アイシクルライン), the implication being that Subaru named all three. But this will be left as-is, much like the other two.

With her slender throat trembling, Emilia charged at Volcanica.

Wielding strength from the entirety of her frame, her body felt incredibly heavy. Though the used Mana itself had been what had exited her body, the burden its utilization put onto Emilia was tremendous.

Turning over a bucket with water stored in it, naturally, called for adequate strength as well.

Since she had used power akin to turning over a fountain instead of a bucket, it would only be a matter-of-course should Emilia feel totally exhausted. However, she voiced.

Emilia: “I can’t lose heart!!”

Shouting like that, Emilia poured life into herself.

Stamina and Mana were different things, yet by making herself hear those words to do her best, she felt the rise of a strength that had previously been asleep. Though it perhaps was something wrong, if the one being deceived was her own self, then sometimes lying was not all bad.

Volcanica: *“SATELLAAAA——!!”*

With its breath having been defended against, Volcanica swung its forelimbs and tail whilst roaring.

A shock charged in from outside her perception, and Emilia defended against it by relying on the sensation of the icicles deployed in her surroundings—— as the seven ice warriors that had been generated were shattered, they assisted Emilia’s body.

Evading the impact being swung down upon them by leaping sideways, the ice warriors halted the follow-up of the forelimbs with their bodies, and borrowing their shoulders, Emilia leapt greatly. As the tail whip swung upon Emilia in midair, she reached the height of the two ice warriors who were supporting her on their back, the tail devouring the soldiers’ bodies as sacrifice.

Emilia: “Shah! Hiyah! Yah!!”

Borrowing strength by way of their noble sacrifice, Emilia hammered in the ice lance whilst rotating her body. Though it was not sufficient enough to pare the Divine Dragon’s outer layer, but enough to catch its attention.

Evading the forelimbs swung in annoyance as some of her silver hair got sliced off, Emilia successfully charged into Volcanica's bosom whilst risking her life—— From that position,

Emilia: "That, white scale——"

If only it could be touched, if only it could be successfully attacked; pondering so, Emilia looked overhead.

The Divine Dragon once again close enough to touch, with its white scale, which was difficult to take a direct look at, right before her, Emilia widened her eyes.

The reason being astonishment. It had not been a scale that had turned white. It was not.

Present there was a white scar, large enough to be mistaken for a scale.

Emilia: "An old, wound…"

The wound had already been closed, and would surely not ache upon being touched.

However, the Divine Dragon disliked the wound simply being touched, bringing him much agony. Comprehending that it was involved with Volcanica's unerasable old memories, Emilia's breath hitched.

Taking advantage of her hesitancy of a singular moment, Volcanica flapped its wings.

Emilia: "AH——!"

Volcanica's ginormous frame ascended above at once, leaving Emilia behind as she stretched her hands.

Emilia greatly lamented her own failure.

This was the utmost unfavorable situation, of crossing lances with an existence possessing wings.

Should she be arbitrarily attacked from a location beyond her reach, the liabilities put on her would accumulate in the blink of an eye.

Emilia: "No——!!"

Emilia instantly put her hands on the floor, and from her feet arose ice.

Extending the foothold of ice she had improvised and produced toward the sky, Emilia pursued and desperately reached for Volcanica who was attempting to fly upward.

However, even that foothold of ice hit its limit by ten meters, twenty meters, and the distance beyond that point was outside of her reach——

Emilia: "——Everyone! Please!"

Ice warriors responded to Emilia's call and further raised the foothold of ice.

The soldiers of ice climbed up to the tip of the foothold, which had met its end, then sprung from there at once, then jumping further by stepping on the back of the sprung soldiers, repeating this six times, Emilia stepped into the back of the final one soldier——

Emilia: "Sorry!"

The ice warriors she had powerfully stepped on fractured by their backs.

However, all the falling seven ice warriors upped their thumbs and smiled as they crashed. Accepting such encouragement of theirs, Emilia's hand, having jumped the final time, reached for Volcanica's tail——

Volcanica: "——Foolish."

He drew back its tail along with that single word, and Emilia's fingers grazed the air.

And, the drawn tail energetically rebounded towards the dumbfounded Emilia.

Midair, nowhere for her to run. Even if she were to produce a shield of ice in haste, the strength that would reach her after shattering it alone, would be sufficiently lethally destructive for Emilia.

Emilia: "——Ah."

Failure, difficulty, what should she do, all kinds of thoughts entangled within Emilia's mind.

Amidst the sensation of deceleration of the flow of time, she desperately searched for a breakthrough solution and mobilized every nook and cranny of her body and mind to see if she could do something. She merely did not possess the option named “giving up”.

Because none of the people Emilia dearly loved, not a single one of them, chose to give up. That was why——

Emilia: “I won’t, give up either!”

However, mere mighty words could save no one.

As though to teach her of that transiency, the tail whip of the Divine Dragon cognizant of a long length of time, drew near Emilia——

???: “——Emilia-sama!!”

At that instant, stormy wind coming from directly below faintly assisted Emilia’s ascent.

△▼△▼△▼△

Her body raised by the upward wind, Emilia’s situation faintly changed.

From a situation where Death had a probability of a hundred-percent, to a situation where Death had a probability of ninety-percent.

And that ten-percent probability of survival was made perfect use of by Emilia, who was ignorant to giving up.

Emilia: “——Hk.”

Aiming for Emilia’s head, the tail of the Divine Dragon was swung.

With the ascent increasing in momentum, the aim of that whip of the tail slipped from Emilia’s head to her torso. Comprehending this from her instinct rather than her senses, Emilia folded in her knees the best she could.

Seeking to evade the range of her strike by making her body smaller—— Emilia's tiptoes grazed past the swing of the tail, and the fearsome impact made Emilia's body twirl at an incredible speed.

Emilia "————"

As she held her knees, Emilia's body was blown straight upwards.

Whilst engulfed in an impact such that it felt as if her internal organs would burst out from her head, Emilia gnashed her teeth, generated a foothold of ice in the sky and forcefully halted her body.

An explosive sound echoed, and Emilia, having taken the impact with her entire body, looked downward with tears in her eyes.

In Emilia's field of vision, for whom the ground and the heavens had been turned around due to using the ceiling of ice created in the skies as her foothold, Volcanica's head, and the distant shadow of a person who had appeared from the staircase that led to the First Floor, were visible.

To be precise, it was not a shadow of a person. It was the shadow of a person, and of a ground dragon.

Emilia: "Ram and…!"

It was Ram who had barged in and had reached out to Emilia, assisting her ascend.

Visible from afar, Ram had wounds and blood covering her entire body, and Emilia was unable to hide her astonishment upon seeing that she had come running to this place in that condition.

But, it was thanks to her assistance that Emilia had managed to survive without getting her head hammered.

Borrowing her assistance, Emilia once again poured strength into her knees at that moment.

Using this ceiling of ice as foothold, she would at once challenge Volcanica and mount an assault. In front of Emilia, though, Volcanica had been displaying odd behavior.

Its tail remaining in the swung stance, without glancing towards Emilia, it was looking below.

It seemed as if it had set Ram, who had assisted Emilia, as its next prey. However, that was not the case. The ancient Divine Dragon, what its golden eyes were viewing was not Ram. It was——

Volcanica: "——Patrasche?"

Emilia: "HIYAHHHHHH——!!"

With energy that drowned out Volcanica's mumbling, Emilia's body shot itself downwards.

Half a moment later, Volcanica glanced upward, its tail shattered the ceiling of ice. Too late. Emilia's form was already gone from there, and was not even in front of Volcanica, aiming for its throat.

Emilia's fired form created a different foothold of ice—— no, a "*sloape*"[312] of ice.

In Pristella, at a time she had been running away from Regulus together with Subaru, this was the article she had created in order to not decrease their speed, but rather to increase it further—— creating it while airborne, she glided with footwear of ice.

Emilia accelerated in midair, out of the reach of the tail strike pursuing her.

A runway of ice was produced in midair, and Emilia's fluttering silver hairs, trailed by the tail which was merely an instant behind, accelerated further and further, and——

Emilia: "HEYAAA——!!"

Having leapt out from the runway, Emilia's kick drew near Volcanica's throat with incredible speed.

It evaded Volcanica's forelimbs aiming to grasp Emilia, and like a lance that had been thrown straight head, it reached the white scar at Volcanica's throat.

Volcanica: "——Haaahraaapreeeah!!"

With the white soles of Emilia's shoes capturing its throat, Volcanica screeched once again.

[312] Should be "slope", as this is a loanword (スロープ), however, it's slightly mispronounced in narration, as it's in Hiragana and not Katakana (すろーぷ), implying that it's a loanword Emilia got from Subaru.

She let out a shout of “KYAAAAA!!”, and plugged her ears upon the voice that seemingly fissured the skies, then fell down in one go due to the recoil of the kick.

Emilia: “Kya…! Uwah, thanks!”

The ice warriors who were supposed to have become a foothold for her and fallen, caught the plunging Emilia.

Saved by the light impact, Emilia stood up at that spot. Then, she confirmed that she had returned to the uppermost stratum and that Volcanica was agonizing high in the skies.

Afterwards, she once again dashed towards the Monolith at the central pillar.

Running, dashing, she sprinted towards the handprint of the Monolith, the one that gave her a sense of *déjà vu——*

Emilia: “I knew it!!”

Reaching the Monolith, she pressed her hand this time with no hindrances.

Though the Monolith was shaken by her energy and impact, Emilia’s hand matched the handprint in question perfectly. She did not know how many people possessing identical hands existed in this world, but at the very least, this handprint on the Monolith belonged to someone whose hand was identical to Emilia’s. And——

Volcanica: “——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner.”

Emilia: “Ah…”

The Divine Dragon descended whilst flapping its wings, towards Emilia who had placed her hand on the Monolith.

With its enormous build levitating in the air, having rebound from sanity to senile state, it once again repeated its initial question.

However, that question felt unlike the initial ones, which had seemingly stemmed from everything being the result of a trance—— She felt, that the questioning was surely going to commence.

Volcanica: *"——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."*

Words she had heard, time and time again.

I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit—— In other words, it was asking the emotions of the one who had reached the top.

What did they wish to do, what did they wish for, what did they come to this place for.

Emilia: "————"

For that question, Emilia had plenty of answers.

What she wished to do, what she wished for, what had she come to this place for, the answers were many.

However, right now, in these very moment, Emilia's urgent desire was——

Volcanica: *"——I ask. Thy will!"*

As the repeated question entered Emilia's ears, she widened her eyes and opened her mouth.

And, loudly answered.

Emilia: "——For everyone, to get along!!"

△▼△▼△▼△

That instant, a violent gust blew, swallowing the sand sea within.

Subaru shouted "Woah!?" as he evaded the Witchbeasts' fierce attacks, and even Beatrice shouted "What, I suppose!?" whilst gruelingly healing Meili.

The same went for Julius, who was engaged in an inhuman battle unfolding against Shaula.

——No, his astonishment may have been greater than that.

For the dusty whirlwind had concealed his field of vision, and though he had stepped back sensing danger, he had not been subject to a pursuit.

And, with the answer right before his eyes, Julius's astonishment increased.

Julius: "——This is… Subaru!!"

Subaru: "Huh!? What is it!? I can't see anything because of the goddamn sand…"

Julius: "It is no problem! This way!"

Hearing Julius's earnest call, Subaru turned towards that direction while spitting out the sand inside his mouth.

And upon doing so, he understood the reason behind Julius's desperation, and widened his eyes. That was——

Subaru: "——Shaula!?"

Shaula: "——Bishaaan!!"

Subaru raised a startled voice; what had entered into his field of vision was the figure of the Crimson Scorpion, toppled, bathing in the sandy whirlwind, its multitude of legs overturned on the sand.

The guardian of the Watchtower had cornered them with mechanic movements, not displaying any response whatsoever to any attacks—— an error had arisen in its actions, actions that had been in accordance with the star she called herself as.

Subaru: "Did you do something!?"

Julius: "No, nothing special. I was focused on enduring its attacks. And, the instant the gust of sand blew earlier…"

Subaru: "Gust of sand… That's right, that wind was…"

There was something off about calling the vehement wind that had swallowed Subaru and the others as a “gust of sand”.

The gusts of sand mercilessly swallowed those who entered the Augria Sand Dunes, but since they had broken through the problematic barrier, never even once had wind blown in the environs of the Watchtower.

Nothing worth of being called a gust of sand, at least. The reason why that had blown just now was——

Beatrice: “Subaru! Look, in fact! The sky.”

Subaru: “————”

So shouted Beatrice at Subaru with her cute voice, the latter’s thoughts fragmented and in disarray. Hearing that, Subaru was enticed to look upwards.

The alteration that had occurred in Pleiades Watchtower, was a sudden change easy to grasp.

Subaru: “——The clouds… have cleared up.”

The Pleiades Watchtower stretched to the heavens, piercing through the clouds.

Its uppermost stratum had been literally invisible from below due to the clouds’ cover. The odd clouds that had concealed the Watchtower had disappeared, completely.

He then finally noticed—— the gale from earlier had been for the purpose of those clouds being dispersed.

The clouds had subsided, and the summit of the Tower was visible from below.

What that could mean, according to Subaru’s hopeful observations, was solely one thing.

Subaru: “——Did you do it, Emilia.”

In the whispering Subaru’s perception, the comrades inside the Tower were being sensed by Cor Leonis; those whose sensation had disappeared earlier, namely Emilia, then Ram and Patrasche, had now returned.

Ram and Patrasche had likely headed to support Emilia, and their labor had bore fruits there.

In other words, if Subaru's thoughts were correct——

Subaru: "The Tower's rules were rewritten… Shaula! Hey, Shaula! Listen to me!"

Shaula: "——Bishaaan!!"

Subaru: "You don't have to fight us, not anymore! You can now, freely…"

The reason behind the suffering of the toppled, agonizing Crimson Scorpion was perhaps due to the severing of the Covenant of antiquity etched within herself. He was unaware of any specific details.

But, it was fine now. She no longer needed to suffer——

Subaru: "Hey, Shau——"

Julius: "——Hk! Subaru!!"

While he tried to call out to her, Subaru's nape was grasped as he approached. That moment, a sharp tail stabbed through the empty space.

The gale brushed past him, the scent of burning air entered his nose and Subaru was rendered speechless.

Had Julius not stopped him just now, he would have received a direct hit.

However, what was tormenting Subaru was not the sensation of Death——

Subaru: "Hey, Shaula! Shaula! Why's this happening, get a hold of yourself!!"

Shaula: "——Bishaaan!!"

Whilst listening to Subaru's frantic pleads, the Crimson Scorpion slowly return to its stance atop the sand.

The Crimson Scorpion rectified its posture after being toppled, its compound eyes flickering; however, it slowly perceived Subaru once again as drool spilled down from its fiendish fangs.

That, did not seem to be the behavior of a being with reason——

Julius: "——Subaru, it is regrettable, but…"

Pronouncing so, Julius grasped Subaru's shoulder and sought to step ahead.

However, discerning his thoughts, Subaru gripped his arm and restrained him.

He could tell that Julius was kindly going to take up the role of the villain.

But, he could not allow him to.

Subaru: "To save her, that's what I resolved—— I am, going to save her out of this."

Julius: "You mean to say that is your duty as her Master who is unaware of being her Master?"

Subaru: "No."

Shaking his head horizontally, that was how Subaru responded to Julius's words.

That was wrong. Subaru wanted to save Shaula not because he was her Master,

Subaru: "It's not because I'm her Master. I was moved by her kindness, that's why."

Julius: "————"

Subaru: "It's the same as Beako. How can you leave someone who was always all alone in this stupid Tower of Sand, and cried because of how fun the days she had spent with us were for her?"

Gnashing his molars, Subaru declared so with Julius's arm still in his grip.

Gazing back at Subaru, Julius took a breath.

Julius: "…Such obstinacy. But that is what should be done."

Subaru: "——Julius?"

Julius: "No, I was impressed once again. I had put up appearances once. Then, they must be put up until the very end, you see."

Faintly smiling, Julius answered so whilst touching the wound on his left cheek with a finger.

Subaru narrowed his eyes at his answer, and noticed a soft sensation grasping his free left hand. The one behind that action was Beatrice.

She was peering at Subaru with her round, utmost lovable eyes in this whole world,

Beatrice: “Meili’s no longer in critical condition, I suppose. What remains is to——”

Subaru: “Will you help in getting her out?”

Beatrice: “How brutish would Betty be should she refuse now, in fact… Geez, Subaru is a truly hopeless *aikata*, I suppose.”

Beatrice’s reply made Subaru give a bitter smile as he scratched his head.

Subsequently, firmly grasping the hand of his precious Contracted Spirit, he faced the Crimson Scorpion—— Shaula, once again.

The two Spirit Knights, standing side-by-side, faced the young maiden who must be saved. And——

Subaru: “At this point, both my mind and body are totally drained—— So, hurry up and get saved, Shaula!”

——Pleiades Watchtower capture, final overtime period, curtains raise.

Arc 6 Chapter 89 - Shaula

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 9 “Shaula”

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Eminent Translations — Complete

Ragged, ragged, scattering away.

Crumbling, crumbling, flaking away.

Tired, tired, fading away.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything in the distance was shimmering.

△▼△▼△▼△

——Outside the Tower, the Witchbeast Master had broken through the stampede of countless Witchbeasts by fighting with all her strength.

——On the Second Floor, Reid Astrea, who had seized the body of Roy Alphard, had been defeated.

——On the Fourth Floor, the blasphemer of fate, the vile Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, had been defeated.

——On the First Floor, Emilia had broken through the unknown Examination by fighting bravely and heroically.

A variety of obstacles they had faced while trying to capture the Pleiades Watchtower had been cleared.

This was the result of them trusting in each other, staying unified, and cooperating.

To put it in an Emilia-like way, this was the result of “everyone getting along”.

Thanks to this, they had finally managed to make it to this point.

Therefore, the next step was——

Emilia: "——It won't mean a thing if we don't win this together!"

Back when they had first arrived to Pleiades Watchtower, this was what Emilia had said.

They had come here not to lose anything more, but to recover what had already been lost.

Everyone had agreed with what she had said back then, and everyone had agreed that everyone returning from the sand sea safe and sound was of absolute necessity. It would not be an issue even if more people returned than came.

Subaru, Emilia, Beatrice, Ram, Rem, Meili, Anastasia, or rather, Echidna, and Patrasche as well. And adding Shaula would not be a problem at all.

It would not even matter how loud and boisterous things would be on the way back because of her.

Julius: "——Go!"

Of the two Spirit Knights standing side-by-side, the one who had made the first move was, of course, Julius.

——Julius brought back Qua, who was in the process of healing someone, temporarily halting their treatment, and once again clad himself in an aurora of light with the help of his six Spirits.

Due to the effect of Cor Leonis, Subaru understood that in order for the light of his Od to expand so much, both Julius and his Spirits would have to be under a considerable load.

It was a rather cool technique to pull off. However, no one here wanted to fight an extended battle in the first place.

Subaru: "——A short, decisive battle."

Julius ran as if flying over the sand, leaving a trail of rainbow-colored light in his wake.

Closing the distance in a single instant, Julius brought his sword closer to the Crimson Scorpion. Capturing his movements with its compound eyes, it swung its pincers and stinger with the fierceness of a storm.

However, with the momentary contact the rainbow sword's attack made with the scorpion's shell, white smoke began to rise.

It had caused it to melt.

It had not even been able to protect itself after receiving that blow, for Julius's strike had turned into a rainbow, his magic sword wrapping itself in sixfold light due to the constant use of Al Clarista.

Moreover, the light of the rainbow enveloping his entire body was not just for show, either.

Julius: "————"

The ray of light, fired from the stinger at close range, had killed Subaru more than a dozen times, and had also been used as the weapon of Death that had led to the deaths of Emilia and Julius—— *Jigoku no Sogeki*[313].

Julius did not deflect it with his sword, but rather by using the defensive capabilities of the aurora of light.

The aurora of light, which enveloped his entire body, applied the concept of the magical technique of Al Clauselia, which created a rainbow barrier.

And so, a transcendental swordsman who could unify both offense and defense, and could thus be called the Rainbow Spirit Knight, was born.

Shaula: "——Bishaaan!!"

Its defenses were being broken through, and it could not land a single lethal blow; as a result, the Crimson Scorpion was having an awful time.

[313] Italicized and flipped for consistency with earlier volumes. Means "Sniping of Hell (lit.)" (地獄の狙撃), originally "ヘルズ・スナイプ" (Hell's Snipe).

However, the Witchbeast that had been the guardian of the Watchtower for the past four-hundred years had a sense of dignity. Its crimson shell growing brighter and brighter, a great amount of heat was released from its powerful pincers, then slamming into Julius, blowing the Rainbow Knight quite a ways away.

Its large pincers gave off extreme heat, the atmosphere around the Crimson Scorpion starting to distort due to the intensity of the heat.

Blazing-hot pincers—— if Subaru were to confer this a name, he would call this the Jesus Scissors Hellfire Form[314].

It was quite admirable for it to show off its new techniques in order to try to liven up the final battle, but in truth, he did not want it to show any growth. An enemy breaking out of their shell and fulfilling its potential was extremely undesirable at the moment.

Beatrice: “MINYA!!”

It swung its crimson pincers through the air but those were deflected by purple stakes from the side, preventing them from making contact with Julius.

By himself, Subaru was not enough to do anything in the high-level battle between Julius and the Crimson Scorpion. As a result, Beatrice covered for Julius to the side whilst Subaru waited for an opportunity to do something.

Subaru: “————”

He made sure to keep himself out of harm’s way so he would not be killed by the aftermath of the battle. Subaru then pointed his gaze at the sea of sand that had been devastated by the whirlwind that had driven the swarm of Witchbeasts away from there.

In terms of the damage inflicted and their sheer vigilance, the Witchbeasts that inhabited the Augria Sand Dunes had had a major impact on Subaru and the others during their journey.

[314] As you can imagine, this is all Engrish (ジーザス・シザース・ヘルファイアフォーム). Flipping it would sound just as fucking awful, it’d be something like, 耶蘇鋏業火様態.

However, what was truly unusual was that they were now staying away from the Watchtower and looking at it from a distance.

Emilia had probably rewritten the rules of the Tower on the First Floor, causing the clouds to disperse.

Perhaps that had served as a measure to keep Witchbeasts away from the Tower? Witchbeasts did not seem to even approach the Watchtower originally, so the fact that a stampede of Witchbeasts had approached it was rather unnatural.

Whatever the case may be, the fact the Witchbeast were not intervening and joining the battle was a huge relief to Subaru and the others, who were attempting to get the Crimson Scorpion's——Shaula's sanity back.

Beatrice: "——SUBARU!!"

Subaru: "Ah."

So that he could find an ideal position, Subaru cut across the sea of sand diagonally, but while doing so, he heard someone's shout.

Right as Subaru looked up to confirm what was going on, the Crimson Scorpion, which had been dodging the many sword thrusts of Julius, somehow landed right next to him.

Subaru stopped in his tracks after hearing Beatrice's call, who was right next to him holding his hand. However, as if flicking away an insect, the Witchbeast's tail whipped towards them, that one strike making Subaru aware of Death.

Subaru: "Persevere——!!"

Beatrice: "——Murak!"

Subaru and Beatrice made their judgments at the same time.

The effect of gravity lessened, causing them to become as light as cotton candy. And simultaneously, Subaru's whip wrapped around the base of the Crimson Scorpion's tail.

In the next second, Subaru and Beatrice were flung through the air at high speed, due to the momentum of the tail being swung.

Subaru: “Wah——”

Beatrice: “Pyyah!?”

They had not been flung into the air, but shaken off. After feeling as if they were floating through the air, they had immediately fallen to the ground and were now covered in sand.

If there had been a hard surface beneath them, even though they were presently as light as cotton candy, their bodies would have shattered due to the sheer power and force. Luckily, they had only had their breath knocked out of them since it had been the sand.

Subaru: “We gotta give up on chasing after it——!”

Shaula: “——Bishaaan!!”

The Crimson Scorpion continued to target Subaru and Beatrice, who were still buried in the sand. However, the light of the rainbow cut in between them, preventing it from making a move, and the heat and sixfold light clashed with each other.

Every time the light was scattered, a sea of destruction was left in its wake, and the shockwave it caused kicked up a sandstorm under the clear sky.

The destructive power of each was equal, Julius had speed on his side, but the Crimson Scorpion was rather resilient—— if it were to progress in this manner, without a decisive blow being struck, it was possible they would be overwhelmed, their time running out.

Subaru: “——Pfft, pfft! Shit, something needs to be done!”

Beatrice: “——Pfft, pfft! Figure out a way to win then, in fact!”

——Together, Subaru and Beatrice got themselves out of the sand and spat the grains of sand in their mouths out in the same manner.

With tears in their eyes, they tried to figure out how to get the sound of Subaru's voice as well as Julius's rainbow light to reach Shaula.

There were three possibilities they could rely on——

The first was for Julius to suddenly awaken an even greater power and defeat the Crimson Scorpion in a single blow. This one was a bit unpleasant, but would be a win nonetheless.

The second was for Subaru and Beatrice to successfully complete their new spell and finish off the Crimson Scorpion, obtaining a win with their teamwork.

The third was for Emilia to suddenly drop down from the sky with love & peace[315] in tow, bringing about world peace with her cuteness.

Subaru: "I'd really rather hope for the third one and not the first, but…"

As stated before already, Subaru did not believe that he himself was capable of successfully awakening something, and it was unrealistic to expect Emilia to show up with the perfect timing.

That being the case, the best they could hope for was Julius suddenly becoming stronger.

Subaru: "He's already done that once, so I can't expect too much from him…"

Julius and the Crimson Scorpion continued to fight at a speed that Subaru's eyes could not follow.

Pondering what to do next, Subaru stared at the devastation occurring right in front of him, the aftermath of which was capable of turning him to ash if he got too close.

The only thing he could do in the end was to fight with all the cards he had in his hand.

If that was the case, then the least he could do was to exhaust every card in his arsenal, and be Natsuki Subaru successfully.

Subaru: "Thinkthinkthink…"

[315] It's difficult to be a hundred-percent sure of it, but this (ラブ＆ピース) might be a Trigun reference. See here (may contain spoilers).

His brain going at full throttle, going over that which was not simply a hopeless dream or observation, reeling in something with substance.

And so, while searching for cards he could have in his hand, Subaru realized something.

He still had one last card he had yet to use.

Subaru: "——Beako!"

Beatrice: "Did you think of something, I suppose!"

Beatrice responded to Subaru's call with eagerness, as if she had been waiting for it.

Blessed to have such an understanding partner, Subaru clasped her hand with his once again and nodded vigorously with a "Yeah!". And——

Subaru: "——Here, I'm gonna use all of the strength this journey gave me!"

△▼△▼△▼△

Ragged, ragged, scattering away.

Crumbling, crumbling, flaking away.

Tired, tired, fading away.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything in the distance was shimmering.

The fierce light of a rainbow flashed in front of her eyes, and, following her instincts, she swung her arms to get rid of it.

Her two bright crimson pincers glowed, containing enough power to burn anything in existence regardless of whether the object was rock or steel, and could cut through them as easily as cutting through butter.

Shaula: “Buuut, I’m not really sure what *butter*[316] even is, either.”

Talking about things based off secondhand knowledge, she continued to chase after that shimmering target.

However, this place was the vast sand sea, devoid of any obstacles, so there was no way for her to corner them. But whether this was a place where there was nowhere to run or where she had to fight from a distance, she had complete mastery in such things——

Shaula: “After all, *sogekishu*[317] are always alone, right?”

This was also something she had heard before. A *sogekishu* was a sniper, someone who needed to wait patiently before completely finishing off their prey.

And so she also chose to wait. With the pride of a *sogekishu* in her heart, she continued to wait.

Day after day, night after night, she gazed into the horizon, forever waiting, looking at those who attempted to come to the Tower.

There were rules there. Rules that bound her to the Tower.

She was upset about that, but she also thought that if there were no rules at all, her forgetful self would have forgotten various things in no time.

Whether it was the places they had gone to together, the words they had spoke to each other, the time they had spent together, or the feelings and thoughts they had shared, they would all be forgotten.

Shaula: “Ahhh… That’d be terrible, wouldn’t it.”

Everything had moved on, leaving her behind.

---

[316] The word employed here is a loanword from Engrish (バター), and the subtext is that this is yet another term that Shaula got from whoever she got her other Engrish words from. These lines in this passage are given as normal character lines (denoted with 「」, rather than 『』), but it should be made clear that these aren’t something other characters can hear or understand.

[317] Engrish flip. Means “sniper” (狙撃手), originally “スナイパー” (sniper).

Because she had been asked to wait, she could wait for as long as they desired, but since she had been made to wait, she could not help but hope that the person she was waiting for would come back. As long as they came back, she could wait forever. Therefore——

Shaula: "I was so happy that Master came back."

Because, one-by-one, everyone had disappeared.

When he came back, she was not sure if she could believe the words he said.

Had she waited because she had believed in him, or had she continued to wait simply out of habit? She was not even able to answer this question. She had never even thought about it before.

There was no reason to think about it, either, for before it had disappeared, they made true on their promise.

Shaula: "I'm one happy person, Master."

So, please never leave. It'd be great if you could stay here forever.

Because she was no longer alone and could graduate from being a *sogekishu*, she thought she should receive an appropriate reward for graduating.

Shaula: "I don't want to be left behind again, Master… I, too, want to be loved."

Everything had moved on, leaving her far behind.

Therefore, this time, she wanted to follow him, no matter where or when. Therefore——

Shaula: "I hope you can come to love me—— Master."

△▼△▼△▼△

The Crimson Scorpion's body twitched, the glow of its crimson shell growing ever brighter.

It was possible that it was a reaction of its Offense Hue, becoming more intense, but to Subaru's eyes, that did not seem to be the case.

It was as if that crimson hue came about due to Shaula crying.

It was the expression of the true thoughts of the being named Shaula, who had locked her feelings away for the past four-hundred years, keeping her promise to stay in the Tower.

Red was the color of fervor, red was the color of passion, red was the color of unrestrainable "love".

The crimson hue of the Crimson Scorpion had certainly been brought about by its strong desire to love and be loved by the person it loved.

Subaru: "——After all, everyone says that women of Scorpio[318] are extremely loving!!"

With a vigorous yell, while kicking up sand, Subaru made great use of his shoulders to fling his whip.

Subaru: "————"

He aimed at the one whose back was turned to him, and was fighting and fooling around with Julius. The Crimson Scorpion.

He used his whip to announce his presence, seeing that she was so busy, but the Master she longed for was standing right there. Since she was making advances on another man, he had no choice but to say some nasty things to her——

Subaru: "Seeing you go after another man like this really makes me sad and wounds my manly heart, you know——!!"

Beatrice: "Subaru's way of speaking is disgusting as usual, in fact!"

[318] There's a bit of a wordplay going on here. Subaru uses "さそり座の女" here to mean "women of the sign Scorpio", however, the same expression used for the sign Scorpio here, can also take to mean the constellation Scorpius, of which the star Shaula is a part of as the second brightest. And as a bonus, the title of Chapter 68, "The Woman of Scorpius" (サソリ座の女), is the same as the expression employed by Subaru here, just switching "さそり" for their Katakana counterparts.

Having been pushed onwards by Beatrice's harsh words from behind his head, Subaru unleashed his whip and landed a perfect hit—— it beautifully wrapped itself around the base of the Crimson Scorpion's tail.

However, just this alone would still lead to what had happened not too long ago, with them being buried into the sand.

The Crimson Scorpion, perhaps because it did not think much of their game of tug-of-war, instead focused on the fight with Julius, completely ignoring Subaru and Beatrice altogether.

Subaru and everyone else was weak—— He would take advantage of that idea.

Beatrice: "El Vita——!!"

Subaru: "GAAAAAH!!"

Beatrice chanted the magic spell, causing its effects to pour over Subaru's whole body, his legs sinking into the sand due to the sheer weight.

In contrast to Murak, which mitigated the effects of gravity, Vita increased the effects of gravity——with this, Subaru's weight had been raised from *Makuuchi* to *Yokozuna* class[319], allowing him to compete with the tail of the Crimson Scorpion.

Naturally, that alone would not be enough. It could enhance the effects of gravity, but only up to a hundred and some dozens more kilograms. That was nowhere near enough to compete with the monstrous strength of Shaula, who could easily pick up and carry a dragon carriage. Therefore——

Subaru: "——Time for the climax! DO IT!!"

With both hands pulling hard on the whip and his feet firmly planted in the sand, Subaru let out a loud cry. In the next instant, Subaru's body, which was being pulled up by the brute strength of the Crimson Scorpion's tail, returned to the ground.

[319] *Makuuchi* (幕内) is the top division of professional sumo, which is always fixed at forty-two wrestlers. *Yokozuna* (横綱) is the title given to the absolutely highest rank, which is denoted by the use of a *tsuna* (綱) worn around the waist, a kind of rope that is used to mark off sacred areas in Shinto. In this context, the narration is basically saying that Subaru became reaaally heavy. For more information, see here.

The obvious reason as to why, was because the contrasting forces were evenly matched, those of the Crimson Scorpion and Subaru—— No, of Subaru and everyone else.

???: "————KSHEEEEEEGHHH!!"

Now in front of Subaru, still standing firmly in place, was the Hungry Horse King, who had broken into their game of tug-of-war with its huge, strange-looking body, gripping the whip with force.

Moreover, the Hungry Horse King was not the only one to join this unprecedented game of tug-of-war.

Bears with flowers all over their bodies, moles in possession of wings, and suspicious serpents all joined the battle.

All of these Witchbeasts, who were supposed to be Subaru's enemies, were giving him a helping hand in this battle.

The cause of this scene was none other than——

???: "…Really, you're such a slave driveeer."

It was the voice of a girl enveloped in an atmosphere of displeasure, of listlessness.

The owner of that voice was a young girl, her cheeks devoid of blood, a girl who was having trouble breathing—— Meili.

Tightening her lovely face, she let out a long, hard sigh.

Then, yelling out a "Hoorah!" and clapping loudly——

Meili: "Okay, come here, everyone. Watching from the side is a wasteee."

A single clap, and after a single beat, the sandy sea began rumbling.

Continuously pouring into this area were Witchbeasts, whose footsteps and roars could be heard. This demon-infested place called the Augria Sand Dunes had been taken under the control of the Witchbeast Master—— no, she could no longer be called that.

The scale of the phenomenon occurring was not one had been caused by the likes of a Witchbeast Master.

Employing the power of the Divine Protection of Fiend Manipulation, she guided and took control of the herds of Witchbeasts occupying the Augria Sand Dunes, so the title of mere Witchbeast Master no longer suited her.

It was as if the Mother of Witchbeasts, who had left a trail of destruction in the Empire to the south, had returned.

She once again made use of her skills to cause a stampede for this battle, turning it into all-out war.

Meili: "————"

Though Meili wore an expression of pain on her face, she still managed to stay conscious, having recovered enough to participate in the final battle. There was a little trick behind it.

Subaru had, naturally, used Cor Leonis to distribute the damage Meili had taken to someone else—— Sharing it, had been the last card in his hand.

Not with Emilia, not with Beatrice, and not with Ram, either. Nor was it shared with Julius, Echidna, Patrasche, Meili, or the sleeping Rem. It was the one who had come with them to conquer the Augria Sand Dunes, their last ally——

Subaru: "——Sorry to get you involved, Gian! Give me a hand!!"

Far away, on the Watchtower's underground—— The ground dragon who had been left on the Sixth Floor of the distant Watchtower, Gian, was also within the range of Cor Leonis' influence, and so, as a result, Subaru made the decision to share that burden with the ground dragon.

The decision to do so was heartbreaking for Subaru, but what was even more heartbreaking for him was that Gian met the conditions of Cor Leonis for those who wished to share his burdens.

This meant that, just like Beatrice and his other friends, Gian wanted to support Subaru's actions.

Subaru was grateful for Gian's spirit being straight out of a movie, asking of the ground to take most of Meili's burdens by transferring them using himself as a conduit. This was the trick that had allowed Meili to get back in the game.

It was also the main reason as to why the Crimson Scorpion had lost in the competition of strength. And also——

Subaru: "——This will be the cause of your defeat, Shaula."

Subaru had taken command of the battle, even using the power of Witchbeasts and a ground dragon. And, as he spoke, the Crimson Scorpion's legs were lifted.

The Finest of Knights did not let this opportunity go to waste.

Unleashing a rainbow slash, Julius cut the tail of the Crimson Scorpion, who had been struggling against them in a battle of strength, clean off.

???: "————"

The severed tail let off an explosion, much as it had done earlier as an autotomy, spreading a mass of destruction throughout the area, but it was unable to get through the rainbow light. Its trump card having been blocked, the Crimson Scorpion violently swung his large pincers down at Julius's back.

However, its attack appeared to have been born from a feeling of agitation and impatience due to losing the battle of strength and having its tail cut off. As a result, it was not able to overpower the Knight who had overcome the First Generation Sword Saint in battle.

Julius: "Shhh——!"

The slash drew an arc through the air, beautifully slicing through the vulnerable joint on the left pincer. Still trying to regain its balance after its left pincer got sliced off, it attempted to chop Julius in half with its remaining right pincer.

And right as the pincer was about to close, threatening to bisect his slender body from the waist——

Julius: "——Al Clanveir."

A moment before the pincer snapped shut, an aurora of light enveloped Julius's entire body in a single breath.

As soon as he deactivated his rainbow armor, that aurora of light spread in an explosion inside the pincer that was about to close, blowing it to shreds.

Shaula: “——Bishaaan!!”

Pushed by the shockwave of the explosion, the massive body of the Crimson Scorpion flew into the air. And with that, it finally fell into the sand, tumbling magnificently, its tail and arms lost and covered in injuries.

And in addition, the other Witchbeasts quickly swarmed around it, pinning the capsized Crimson Scorpion down.

With its eight legs being restrained, the Crimson Scorpion had been prevented from moving.

Still resisting its fate, it turned its large head, barring its sharp teeth.

Taking the Crimson Scorpion’s resilience into account, it would not be surprising for it to suddenly come up with a new move at this very moment, spurred on to achieve new growth due to its current predicament, however——

Subaru: “——This is the end, Shaula.”

Subaru stood right in front of the writhing, struggling, Crimson Scorpion so that its compound eyes could see him fully. With no weapons left and its legs pinned down, it was in a rather sad state. It would be easy to strike the final blow now, but that was not what Subaru wished.

He still was not sure what the correct answer was, despite having been driven to this point——

Subaru: “Meili.”

Meili: “…If I weren’t here, I wonder what you and everyone else would’ve doneee, onii-san.”

Having been called by name, Meili sighed and walked over to the Crimson Scorpion.

Standing next to Subaru, she snapped her fingers with a sigh. And once she had the compound eyes focus on herself,

Meili: “Who are you? The red scary scorpion-san? Or are you…”

Shaula: “————”

Meili: “Or are you someone else, I wondeeer?”

Having been asked such a question, the compound eyes of the Crimson Scorpion gradually slowed down.

Gazing at Meili, its compound eyes showed signs of wavering before turning its gaze to Subaru.

Those aggressive, red compound eyes slowly changed color.

Subaru: “Shaula.”

Together with the crimson hue of its shell slowly fading away, it settled down.

Its eyes turned green once more, its shell went back to being black, and it slowly began to calm down, and finally——

Subaru: “——Shaula!”

And finally——

△▼△▼△▼△

Ragged, ragged, scattering away.

Crumbling, crumbling, flaking away.

Tired, tired, fading away.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything in the distance was shimmering.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything shimmered in the distance.

Anything and everything spilled from her, separated from her, faded, and though they were far, far away, they could be seen glittering.

Even though she had been left behind, even though her memories had faded somewhat, they still shined so brightly.

Because they were so precious to her, she desperately tried to preserve them.

???: "————"

Shaula: "Do you still remember, Master? You told me, «I'll definitely return, so wait here for me», and then you disappeared."

In a seated position, Shaula hugged her knees, inclined her head, and asked like so.

Subaru shook his head at her, her demeanor that of seemingly thinking about nostalgic memories of her past.

Subaru: "I don't remember. And I've already told you I don't know, right? Don't keep making me repeat myself."

Shaula: "Weeell, it can't be helped then. After all, Master is so much better at forgetting things than me. Master and I really are similar."

Subaru: "That creeps me out! No, I admit that we have a similar *konomi*[320] in our speech, though."

That said, it was only due to the fact that she was using words from Subaru's world that he unconsciously felt a sense of closeness with her.

Subaru was not as charming, cute, or spirited as she was.

He was not willing to wait four-hundred years for someone who had abandoned him.

Subaru: "I'm an impatient guy who wants immediate results, after all. Well, if I could at least be with the other person, I might be able to endure it…"

[320] Engrish flip. Means "taste/choice" (好み), originally "センス" (sense). This is most likely referring to how Shaula and Subaru both spam Engrish left and right, most things aside from politeness of speech are completely different, pronouns, tics, etc.

Shaula: “Ah~, you’re no good like this, Master! Ready? There’s a saying for this, «the key to love is patience!»”

Subaru: “Aren’t you confusing that with «The key to fashion is patience»!? Isn’t that more of a slogan of a financially-supporting woman, rather than that of a devoted woman!?”

Shaula: “Everything is for fulfilling the love swirling around in the depths of my heart. You can even laugh at this sad, pathetic woman. That kind of laughing face is also very attractive… Hm.”

Subaru: “Nope, I’m not laughing at all. Look, I’m starting to tear up.”

Shaula: “Let me see, let me see.”

When Subaru pointed at his face and said that, Shaula got up and walked over to him.

Shaula, who had jumped up enthusiastically, came close enough that he could feel her breath, so he once again examined her fine face from up-close.

Her eyes were striking even if slit-like, conveying a strong sense of purpose, and between them was present a finely-shaped nose.

She had long, slender eyelashes, her skin so soft and firm that it was hard to imagine that she had been living in the sea of sand for so long. Although hidden by her spirited and varied expressions, her body as a whole was rather beautiful instead of cute.

Given the name of a star, she was someone destined to wait in this place for the return of the one she loved.

Shaula: “Huh? Master, your eyes are glistening, are you crying a little?”

Subaru: “…Your Master is a piece of shit. I’m going to punch him in the face if I ever get the chance.”

Shaula: “Then I’ll have to witness it with super-duper mixed feelings! What sort of horrible situation would it be if Master KO’d Master…! Jeez.”

Lips quivering, Subaru squeezed his eyes shut.

His hot emotions rose, pushing past his eyelids and falling down his cheeks.

Seeing those transparent tears fall, Shaula gently whispered “Jeez”, and then——

Subaru: “————”

While Subaru’s eyes were closed, his cheek was suddenly attacked by a wet sensation.

Upon opening his eyes, he saw Shaula’s face pulling away from his. Her fingertips on her lips, she mischievously smiled with her red tongue slightly sticking out.

Shaula: “…Master’s body fluids, they’re salty and sweet.”

Subaru: “Putting it that way…”

Shaula: “The way I put it… doesn’t change anything at all. I always express my feelings with my whole body and soul, you know—— Master, I love you.”

I love you, she had often told him that.

Once he understood the context, it was impossible for Subaru to say that it was a meaningless statement.

The reason why Shaula would say “I love you” as often as she could, was because her heart was overflowing with love.

Because always, always, the words she wanted to convey would overflow from within her.

For four-hundred years, she had been waiting, wanting to love him, wanting to be loved by him——

Shaula: “I love you, Master.”

Subaru: “…I won’t tell you I love you.”

Shaula: “I know, I know. Because Master is a bad guy, is thin-skinned, and is shy, but that’s what I like about you. I’m crazy about you. *Anata dake*[321].”

[321] Engrish flip. Means “only you” (あなただけ), originally “オンリーユー” (only you).

Subaru: “————”

Time had left her behind, and the role she had been assigned had bound her like chains.

When she had almost hurt to one she loved, she cried and begged for Death. Instead of hurting him with her own hands, she would rather lose it all.

What did he say to her, who was in tears? He said he would never allow her to continue to cry like that.

Subaru: “I won’t say that to you… I love you, or words of the sort.”

Shaula: “…It’s okay. I’ll keep saying the words Master won’t say. Master will definitely want to say them to me sometime in the future.”

Subaru: “Sometime in the future, you say… That’s a looong time. Four-hundred years of waiting… can you really do that?”

Shaula: “Is it? Four-hundred years went by real fast.”

She had once cried out in anguish at the fact she had waited for so long.

Having been left behind by the passage of time, her love holding her hostage, she had cried out that she was lonely.

Now, she had no idea that a world in which she had spilled her heart out had once existed. Therefore, concealed behind her spirited attitude, how much emotion had been swirling around in her own heart?

He had sworn to never make her cry. And he was not going to break that vow even now.

That was why—— he hoped she could cry out. He wished she would cry. But now, that would not be enough.

As long as she cried, bawled her eyes out, cried out, and howled, Natsuki Subaru, who was not her Master or anything like that, would run with all his heart and soul to her side to stop her tears. And yet——

Shaula: “A mere four-hundred years… is almost like the day after tomorrow.”

The Crimson Scorpion was nowhere to be seen, and in its place was a beautiful girl, smiling.

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by Norvak (source)

She was so beautiful that he could not help but become speechless. So ephemeral that it seemed as if she would collapse at the touch of his hand. Shaula's soft cheeks flushed red as she said "Because", her look that of a maiden in love.

Continuing, the maiden in love voiced a "Because"——

Shaula: "——I also loved waiting for you."

Subaru: "————"

Shaula: "Hey, Master. That's why, one day, again——"

△▼△▼△▼△

Ragged, ragged, scattering away.

Crumbling, crumbling, flaking away.

Tired, tired, fading away.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything in the distance was shimmering.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything shimmered in the distance.

Subaru: "——Shaula."

A part of her shell fell off, crumbling and flaking away, and turned into dust.

It did not stop there, but spread to the parts peeling off her whole body.

The tail and pincers that had been cut off, the multiple legs being held down by the Witchbeasts, and the head that Natsuki Subaru held in his arms, everything——

Beatrice: "…Did she, fulfill her purpose, I suppose?"

While the existence whose pieces Subaru had gathered in his arms gradually diminished, Beatrice uttered that to him in a hushed voice.

With a melancholic look, the adorable Spirit gazed at the Witchbeast powerlessly crumbling away—— no, at someone who was just like her, a brethren who had sacrificed themselves to the role allotted to them by destiny.

His brain refused to comprehend what Beatrice had just said.

But he instinctively understood—— This was not Death.

This was, after being entrusted as the Star-Keeper of the Pleiades Watchtower, the inevitable end that she had met today.

Subaru: “Then… We…”

If they had not come here, would she have been able to exist here for eternity?

Forever, in this Tower of Sand, waiting for a person who would never return——

Julius: “——Subaru, you should be well-aware. That that assumption… is insulting to her.”

Subaru: “————”

Julius: “And so, what you should do is not live in regret.”

Sheathing his Knight’s sword back into its scabbard, the Knight tidied up his appearance, which had been dirtied by blood and sand, and spoke such words.

It was a ruthless thing to say, but he was correct nonetheless.

At that, Subaru gritted his teeth and took a deep breath to hide his hatred for the fact that he was correct.

Then he hugged the one who had been alone for so long tighter.

She, who had been left behind and spent such a long time in this place.

Slowly, not being alone, she was being sent off by her one and only.

Subaru, Beatrice, Julius, and Meili were there.

In the distance, there were faint indications of something running from the Tower.

They had to be their other companions.

Everyone was gathering together for her. who had been alone for so long.

Shaula: "But, even if Master were here alone, that'd be enough."

The image of her saying such words, not being demanding at all, appeared in front of his eyes, which slowly began welling up with tears.

The Witchbeast's fangs gently brushed the tears that were slowly trickling down Subaru's cheeks.

The sharp fangs that seemed as if they could destroy anything, intimately, tenderly, and gently caressed Subaru, who was the most fragile of all. And then——

Subaru: "——Ah."

The arms that had been wrapped around her suddenly no longer felt her.

Crumbling, the shell of the Crimson Scorpion that had lost its weight scattered into dust. As he watched the black particles scatter over the sea of sand, Subaru opened his mouth wide.

Subaru: "Shaula…"

Shaula: "Yes, Master."

Subaru: "Shaula… Shaula… Shaula."

Shaula: "Did you call for me? Master."

Subaru: "Shaula, Shaula…"

Shaula: "Well~, being loved so much by Master like this makes me feel so embarrassed~!"

Closing his eyes, the sound of her voice responding to his call rang in his ears.

And yet, now, she no longer existed anywhere.

Subaru: "——Ah."

Crouching down to the ground, Subaru pawed away at the sea of sand in front of him.

The sound of someone's voice reached his ears. He did not know whose voice it was. He did not have the time to confirm who it was, but simply looked up at where it had come from, and widened his eyes.

Still covered in black particles, a mound of sand shook slightly, and something crawled out from it.

It was a rather small being, about the size of a palm. Swinging its two pincers in order to get through the sand and then expertly pulling its body from the sand with its tail, was a small creature with a crimson shell——

Subaru: "————"

It skittered over to Subaru, who was on his knees, and brushed against his hand covered in sand.

The mere act of brushing against him seemed to have been her leaving behind a trace of her charm——

△▼△▼△▼△

Ragged, ragged, scattering away.

Crumbling, crumbling, flaking away.

Tired, tired, fading away.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything in the distance was shimmering.

Ragged, crumbling, and tired, everything shimmered in the distance.

——Everything shimmered, because you were there.

Shaula: "A mere four-hundred years… is almost like the day after tomorrow."

Shaula: "Because I also loved waiting for you."

Shaula: "Hey, Master. That's why, someday, again…"

Shaula: "I hope you'll meet me again someday."

Shaula: "This time, it's Master's turn to wait for me, okay? Instead of the woman doing the chasing, the woman's the one being chased."

Shaula: "Master, this promise is very, very important."

Shaula: "Please don't forget it, this time."

Shaula: "——Master, I love you."

△▼△▼△▼△

Subaru: "You, idiot."

His voice trembling, Subaru muttered that, as if saying he could never forget that.

Then he picked up the being tickling the back of his hand, and cupped it with both hands.

As if it were a little embarrassed, the tiny scorpion trembled, accepting his action.

Its shell was a bright shade of red, so vivid that it seemed like it could burn one's eyes, oh so red.

——That was something that not even the span of four-hundred years could fade, the color of "love"[322].

[322] Author's note: "I was torn on giving today's chapter the title of «Tomorrow's Tomorrow». But since I wrote about the color of «love», naturally, I changed it to this [Shaula]".

Arc 6 Chapter 90 - Hero

Light Novel Adaptation found in Volume 25, Chapter 10 “Hero”, and Volume 26, Prologue “People at the Watchtower (up until halfway)

Original Web Novel Chapter — Complete

Original Translation by Eminent Translations — Complete

——Picking up the tiny scorpion that had emerged from beneath the dust in his hands, in complete silence, Subaru’s shoulders trembled.

He had wanted to save her.

He had wanted to take her out of this lonely Tower of Sand.

He had promised to help her, but now, he had been unable to keep his promise.

Natsuki Subaru was always making promises he was unable to keep.

Everyone: “————”

Not a single soul could utter a word to Subaru, squatting in the sand in silence.

Beatrice, who was beside him, and Julius and Meili, who were behind him, could not find the right words to say.

The scorpion, which had been in his cupped hands, crawled up Subaru’s arm and perched itself on his shoulder, brushing against his neck as if it were trying to comfort him, who had even forgotten to shed tears and weep.

Subaru did not possess a clue as to what the tiny scorpion even was.

What did this scorpion, which had emerged from the dust of the Crimson Scorpion’s crumbling, have to do with Shaula? Or was she this scorpion——

Subaru: "——That's impossible."

In her last moments, Subaru had exchanged words with Shaula.

However, it was not clear whether the conversation had actually happened, or if he had been just imagining it all as she parted.

However, Subaru harbored a sad conviction that it had indeed happened.

Shaula, was gone.

Her existence was tied to the very rules of the Pleiades Watchtower, and was, ultimately, much like Reid or the Monolith of the Third Floor—— something akin to a stage prop for the Examinations.

As a result, once the Watchtower had fulfilled its role, she had to leave.

She had sacrificed herself, in following the role of a stage prop until the very end.

It was impossible that a mere stage prop would open a hole of this caliber in Subaru's heart.

Subaru: "————"

That frank smile, the annoyance he felt because of her desire to interact with him, and her unfamiliar voice calling him "Master, Master" with deep affection, all of it was gone.

If Shaula were to cry out and scream that she did not want to disappear, then Subaru would do everything in his power to stop it from happening, and would sacrifice himself time and time again in order to save her.

However, that was not what she wished for.

Smiling, she had told him she wished to meet him again someday, but then she disappeared shortly after.

He knew not how it would be possible to do so, or even how.

He knew not, but——

Subaru: "Got it… I'm sure I'll meet you again, someday. So…"

With a cheerful smile, he fulfilled her wish, from when she'd told him she loved him. For that reason——

Subaru: "——So, goodbye for now, Shaula."

Her thoughts, which had turned into crimson dust, were stolen away by the sand-laden wind along with her remains.

Witnessing that, Subaru let out a sigh. And then looking at the scorpion which had drawn close to his neck, he saw that it was playing with his ears with its pincers, as if to brighten the mood.

Subaru: "Ouch!"

Feeling a sharp pain, he felt as if he were being urged not to feel down about it.

With tears in his eyes because of the pain, Subaru nodded with an "I got it, I got it" and grabbed the scorpion on his neck, trying to have it disengage from his ears. However——

Subaru: "OUCH! No, I got it already, so you can let me go now… OW! Hey, this is making my ear bleed… This guy! This guy's not letting go…!"

???: "…Onii-san, what are you doiiing?"

His ear still in its grasp, he panicked since he could not manage to peel the Mini-Crimson Scorpion away from it.

At a time Subaru was on the verge of getting the soft cartilage part of his ear absolutely ruined, it was Meili who came to the rescue.

Astounded by what was happening, she quickly moved over to where Subaru was and grabbed the Mini-Crimson Scorpion with her little hand.

Meili: "Even though it's small it's still a Witchbeast-chan you knooow, so if you let it get close to your faaace, it could start chomping on your eyes or nose before you knew what hit youuu."

Subaru: "Eyes and nose!? But, this little guy isn't like that…"

Meili: "It's a Witchbeast-chan, onii-san—— That isn't the naked onee-san anymore."

Subaru: “————”

Saying that, Meili plopped the Mini-Crimson Scorpion onto the top of her head.

The Mini-Crimson Scorpion did not do anything naughty to her head, unlike what had happened to Subaru earlier, with it exacting violence on him. It appeared as if it were under the influence of her Divine Protection of Fiend Manipulation, thus hiding its aggression.

Needless to say, this was proof that the Mini-Crimson Scorpion was a Witchbeast that could be tamed via Meili’s Divine Protection—— as well as proof that the little thing did not contain Shaula’s ego.

Beatrice: “Subaru, let me heal your wounds then, I suppose.”

Then, with his eyes still cast downward, Beatrice tugged on his sleeve and tenderly looked his body over.

In consideration of her, he bit his lip and nodded strongly. He knew he could not stay in the Sand Sea forever.

???: “——Subaru! Everyone!”

In the distance, the big door that served as the entrance to the Watchtower swung open, and Emilia came rushing towards them.

It was clear that she had not had an easy time due to how messed up her clothes looked. They would all be able to chat together, that included as well.

They had too many things to talk about, as well as too many farewells to give.

△▼△▼△▼△

???: “…Shaula was someone who always worked reaaally hard.”

After hearing the details and finding out the reason as to why Shaula was no longer there, Emilia stared out into the Sand Sea, to where her remains had scattered, mourning their loss in a way typical of her.

Gently, she then patted the Mini-Crimson Scorpion on Meili's head with her white fingers. It was rather accepting of Emilia's fingers even though it had been ordered by Meili to behave well, and it seemed to find it quite pleasant even though no change could be seen in its facial expression or demeanor.

???: "Emilia-sama, what went on the First Floor? Were you able to safely complete the Examination?"

After hearing about what happened to Shaula, Emilia looked at Subaru, whose face was sunken, with grief painted on her face.

However, it was Julius who made the first move to change the subject. And after hearing his question, she answered him with an "I think so", and continued,

Emilia: "Mhm, it was pretty difficult because I didn't understand it, but I more or less completed it, I think… Oh, Julius, do you actually know who I am?"

Julius: "——Yes, I do. I can certainly remember who you are, now."

Emilia asked that question nervously, and Julius replied with a look of surprise on his face.

Whilst covering his mouth with his hand, Julius said "Emilia-sama" and pondered it over again, confirming that the Emilia who had previously gone missing had returned, then nodded.

Emilia: "Beatrice! Do you remember me? How about you, Meili?"

Beatrice: "…I remember you, so don't worry, I suppose. It was as if I had completely forgotten you until someone told me I'd forgotten you, in fact. It's such an uncanny feeling, I suppose."

Meili: "I also remember you properlyyy. How about you, onee-san? Do you remember me and all the promises we made?"

Emilia: "Absolutely. I'll never forget them. That's a relief. I had a feeling everything would be okay since Ram and Patrasche remembered me too…"

After hearing Beatrice's and Meili's answers, Emilia gave a sigh of relief and put a hand to her chest.

In reaction to their response, Subaru called out with a "Wait".

And with everyone's attention drawn to himself, Subaru let out——

Subaru: "That's super awesome news, but I want to make proper sense of it. In short? Everyone can properly remember everything about Emilia-tan now, right? That means that, uhh…"

Julius: "——Miss Ram… has slain Ley Batenkaitos."

Subaru: "————"

Subaru widened his eyes after Julius interrupted him and made that declaration.

Ley Batenkaitos—— one of the three Sin Archbishops of Gluttony, and an existence that ought to be dubbed a mortal enemy as far as Subaru and Ram were concerned.

Inside the Tower, In addition to eating Emilia's Name, he was also an enemy who had caused them much hardship with his extreme violence.

After being told that he had been slain, Subaru's throat dried up.

If Ley Batenkaitos had been slain, that meant——

Subaru: "Does that mean the things he stole will be given back…? If that's true…"

If Emilia's Name had returned, that meant the other effects of the Authority of Gluttony would also come undone.

Batenkaitos, who had pretended to be a Gourmet, must have eaten beyond his fill. If everything that had been stolen were to be returned, that would also have an effect on the people in the Watergate City of Pristella——

Subaru: "————"

Thinking about such things, Subaru shook his head.

He knew he should not deceive himself like this. He knew he should not bottle up his feeling and keep bullshitting himself.

Natsuki Subaru, at this very moment, harbored an excessively selfish and egotistical hope.

If Ley Batenkaitos had been slain, and the influence of his Authority had come undone, then——

Subaru: "——Rem, can anyone remember her?"

A girl who had been forgotten by the world, leaving a hole in Subaru's heart because of her absence.

They had gone on this journey to take back what had been pilfered—— and for Subaru, the purpose of this journey had been simply to save Rem.

For the Watchtower, where they had gone to obtain wisdom for that purpose, to be attacked by Gluttony, was rather ironic, but it did not matter as long as they got what they had gone there for.

Subaru looked at everyone, fueled by such hopes. In response to his question, however——

Emilia: "…I'm so sorry, Subaru. But I still can't remember who Rem is."

Subaru: "——Hk! Why?!"

Beatrice: "Same goes for Betty, I suppose. Betty still can't recall who Ram's little sister is, in fact[323]. Moreover…"

Subaru: "Moreover? Moreover, what? What else is there?"

Emilia had denied it, and Beatrice followed, leaving Subaru in a state of shock.

His budding hopes had been shot down, so Subaru rushed over to Beatrice, who had yet to continue her words. With desperation in Subaru's eyes, she pointed towards Julius behind her with her white chin.

Beatrice: "Betty still can't remember Julius, in fact. Perhaps not all of the harm Gluttony caused has been undone, I suppose."

[323] Author's note: "There were many people pointing out that «Beatrice doesn't remember Rem». The scene in Arc 5 where Subaru and Beatrice converse about the effect of the Authority of Gluttony [need to find chapter] has the intention of being a scene like, «Beatrice was not affected by the Authority while inside the Forbidden Library, but once she left, she was affected». Because of that, when Subaru made his Contract with Beatrice and took her out of the Forbidden Library, she forgot Rem. In the case Beatrice remembered Rem, I would feel rattled in having Ram place her innermost thoughts in not only Subaru, but also Beatrice, so I didn't write that. That's the kind of feeling I was going for, so thank you for your feelings". Special thanks to Garcar for helping me decipher what the hell was going on in those last two sentences.

Emilia: “Julius’s…”

Emilia agreed with Beatrice’s opinion with a nod of her head.

Meili, on the other hand, shrugged, since she did not even know Julius before his Name had been taken, and Emilia had no reason to lie, either.

In that case, it was clear that Rem and Julius’s Names had not been returned——

Julius: “As far as that is concerned, I have an idea as to why my Name has not been returned.”

Whilst Subaru was still in a state of confusion, it was none other than Julius who uttered that.

And, after looking back at Subaru and everyone else, his eyes narrowed, Julius continued. It was——

Julius: “——The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Roy Alphard, was captured alive. To be exact, he was the one who bereaved me of my Name. I suppose that is why my Name has yet to return.”

△▼△▼△▼△

Reaching the Fifth Floor after passing through the grand entrance to the Pleiades Watchtower, left behind there was the dragon carriage that had brought Subaru and the others to the Tower of Sand. And, next to it, was a person waving at them.

???: “Long time no see, Emilia-san, Natsuki-kun.”

Subaru: “…No way, is that Anastasia-san?”

Widening his eyes, Subaru stared intently at the smiling, slowly waving figure.

He confirmed that her movements, attitude, and even her expressions were all natural. The Artificial Spirit, Echidna, could reproduce a person’s nature and act exactly like the original—— no, it was not a reproduction.

This was the nature of the original person themselves. Really, he could not call it a reproduction now. That was to say——

Emilia: “Anastasia-san! Did you wake up?”

Anastasia: “Yep. Seems like I took a really long nap and made ya guys worry. Echidna told me ‘bout the things that happened these past few months, too.”

Emilia: “Is Echidna alright, too?”

Anastasia: “How can I put it? For now, other than the thought of blamin’ herself, there ain’t no thoughts like «Let me just die».”

As Anastasia answered Emilia’s question, the scarf around her neck moved, and the white fox lowered her head as if in apology.

With Echidna in that state, Anastasia patted her head, then scolded her with a “Hey now”,

Anastasia: “You’re blamin’ yerself again. I’ve already told’cha before. I chose it myself, so there’s no need for ya to be depressed, Echidna. Ya think so too, don’t’cha, Julius?”

Julius: “Me…? I wonder if I do. If I am to speak honestly, the decision you made caused me quite a lot of worries, so I am afraid giving an answer to that is difficult, Anastasia-sama.”

Anastasia: “It’s difficult, what?”

Julius: “Hearing the reason why you shut yourself within yourself is… all I could ask for as your Knight.”

Unraveling his lips, Julius answered gracefully. Hearing his answer, Anastasia covered her mouth with her hand and said “Forget it, I ain’t gonna force ya to say it” with a smile.

It was a very harmonious conversation. If one were to say that these two were like master and servant, then there would be none who could say otherwise.

Emilia: “Did Anastasia forget about Julius for real? Because they seem to be getting along pretty well…”

Anastasia: “I really did forget ‘bout the relationship we had before… This in itself, for me, is already makin’ me totally angry, downright unbearable…! But…!”

Echidna: “She has been controlling her feelings, so she is acting like that. Fortunately, after being with Julius for the past two months, I can say a few things about him. It appears that I was born for this very purpose.”

Beatrice: “…You too, also seem to be going off in an odd direction, in fact.”

Beatrice spoke a bit gently to Anastasia, whose lips were quivering, and, by extension, Echidna, who was around her neck.

Hearing that, Echidna snorted her fox nose and nodded with a “Yeah”.

Echidna, the Artificial Spirit without any history, and who had gone to the Watchtower in the place of Anastasia, also had her own thoughts and appeared to have been able to come to a positive conclusion.

It seemed as if Anastasia getting her own body back safely had been part of it.

Regrets of having taken actions to whittle down Anastasia’s Od, and a resolution to the problem which she possessed from her birth, it was not like things of the sort had been solved, but——

Subaru: “It’d be insensitive for us to poke around at their affairs, huh.”

The problems between Anastasia and Echidna should be discussed by them alone.

Of course, if they were to ask for their assistance, Subaru and the others would gladly exert themselves for their sakes, and assist them in solving their problems. It would be safe to say that the time they spent on this two-month journey had fostered such a bond.

Emilia: “——Umm, Anastasia-san. I’m reaaally happy that you got back safely and we have plenty of things to talk, but…”

Anastasia: “I know. You wanna know what happened to the Sin Archbishop Julius defeated? He did this and that, then chucked him into the dragon carriage.”

Emilia: “Julius did this and that…”

Anastasia shrugged her shoulders and then gestured at the dragon carriage behind her.

Next to Emilia, who was pondering her words, Subaru silently gazed at the dragon carriage. Within it was Roy Alphard, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, captured.

Subaru: “————”

Before entering the dragon carriage, he stroked the neck of the ground dragon—— Gian, who was attached to the carriage.

With its thick legs, the ground dragon from the Gyras[324] species had played a crucial role in the final battle against Shaula, unexpectedly leading Subaru and the others to victory.

The absolute best result had not been attained. Nevertheless, that did not undermine his consideration for Gian. Not to mention that Meili had been able to survive thanks to Gian’s spirit.

Subaru: “I was totally saved thanks to you… In the future, no matter what happens, please continue to help me out.”

Gian: “————”

Gian, whose thick neck was being stroked, flared his nostrils, as if saying that that would be a heavy burden to carry.

Smiling bitterly, Subar thenput on a serious face, and got on the dragon carriage. Then, after giving a nod to Emilia and the others, he peered inside.

Inside, was the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony——

Subaru: “——That’d be…”

The atmosphere full of tension, Subaru peered into the dragon carriage, and after seeing what was inside, was shocked by what he saw.

[324] Although the Japanese text here (right now, at least) says that Gian is of the “アガレス” species (originally localized as “Agaress”), this appears to be a typo or an instance of Tappei forgetting, as there is a similar passage in the Light Novel that gives him the correct species name, “ガイラス” (Gyras).

Alphard was indeed inside of the dragon carriage. However, the method in which he had been detained was a bit different from what Subaru had imagined.

Roy Alphard, his eyes rolled back revealing the whites of his eyes, was covered in a black crystalline material, effectively detaining—— no, sealing him.

Julius: “It is a Sin Archbishop… So just preventing them from moving would not be enough, right? Hence why I hardened it solid to the best of my ability.”

Subaru: “This hardening thing… What’s the principle behind it?”

Beatrice: “The principle, is that it is an application of Yin Magic, I suppose. Using Shamak to separate them from their consciousness, then it’s made solid with them in it… It’s a very ruthless way of doing it, in fact.”

Subaru: “So this black thing is like a chunk of Shamak…?”

After Subaru heard Beatrice’s explanation, he was a bit shocked, then looked at the seal once more.

It would be no exaggeration to say that, before Subaru formed a Contract with Beatrice, Shamak was the magic spell in which Subaru had relied on the most in this world, but its effects, and the way Julius had utilized it as a means of sealing someone, could only be described as amazing.

Seeing the way Subaru reacted, Julius said “Please do not misunderstand me”,

Julius: “It is not a technique I invented or anything. This exact technique is used to make the world’s most famous seal. Though there is a gargantuan difference in the scale.”

Subaru: “The most famous in the world… No way that’d mean…”

Emilia: “——The Witch of Envy’s, right?”

Emilia, who was looking at the sealed Alphard, said that. Julius gave a deep nod, confirming what she had said.

The seal used on Alphard employed the same technique used further east of the Watchtower—— in that that place, the Witch of Envy had been sealed for the past four-hundred years.

In other words, Julius's, who had created the seal using a tried-and-true method, could be said to be more than reliable enough. But that was not the question that needed to be asked.

Subaru: "The question is, why do you want to keep this guy alive?"

Emilia: "Subaru…"

Subaru spoke so gazing at the sealed Alphard, making Emilia lower her eyebrows.

His heart aching due to her gaze, Subaru turned his head and said, "That's just how it is, right?",

Subaru: "When one of the Gluttonies… When Batenkaitos died, everyone remembered Emilia-tan again. So, if this guy dies, then the rest of the Memories would…"

Julius: "There is no solid proof that they would come back. That is the biggest reason why I did not end his life."

Subaru: "————"

Julius: "There is absolutely no doubt that Miss Ram slayed Batenkaitos. However, was Emilia-sama's Name returned merely because of that? Something else, perhaps he had given it back voluntarily… That possibility cannot be ruled out. If you make a hasty decision, everything could be lost."

Julius threw out one sound argument after another, as if reprimanding Subaru for his impatience.

And his argument was so sound that Subaru, too, could not even offer up a rebuttal. However——

Subaru: "In that case… In that case, what about his Book of the Dead?"

As an alternative, Subaru proposed using a method that only existed in the Watchtower.

When it came to revealing the true thoughts of a person, there was perhaps nothing more suitable than a Book of the Dead. Whatever the case may be, it was something that allowed one to experience another person's life.

Subaru: "Even if you interrogate him, there's no guarantee that he'll spill the beans. If that's the case, then it'd be better to just use his Book of the Dead to reveal this guy's innermost thoughts."

Emilia: “Subaru, that… I don’t think that’s a good idea. This kind of approach is…”

Subaru: “But, I’m sure it’ll work. If we do it this way…”

Anastasia: “Then what? Can I interrupt ya for a sec?”

Emilia displayed a position opposite to the one Subaru held, the latter having proposed using his Book of the Dead. And just as Subaru’s temper was about to flare up, Anastasia butted in by raising her hand.

Anastasia looked at an embarrassed Subaru, and folded her hands on top of her chest——

Anastasia: “I heard from Echidna that there may be things missin’ in ‘em… In the Books of the Dead, was it? So wouldn’t it be dangerous to rely on ‘em too much?”

Subaru: “Dangerous, why do you say so?”

Anastasia: “In any case, that’s somethin’ you’ve vividly experienced yerself, right, Natsuki-kun? I heard that’cha lost yourself while I was asleep.”

Subaru: “————”

How many things could Echidna have possibly told her in such a short period of time, he wondered. Anastasia had hit him where it hurts.

However, the danger the Book of the Dead held did not necessarily coincide with Subaru’s amnesia. The disappearance of his memories had not come about due to the Book of the Dead.

However, that did not completely negate the risk that Books of the Dead posed.

In fact, when he read Meili’s Book of the Dead, some parts of Subaru’s mind and emotions were almost painted over by her personality.

Subaru did not consider himself to be particularly powerful or mentally strong, but even so, he knew not what would happen to someone more impressionable.

Who could say that a new Roy Alphard, who had inherited the soul of the former Roy Alphard, would not be born as a result?

Subaru: “Then… then, Anastasia-san, are you trying to say that it’s right to let this guy live? Even after everything he’s done up until now?!”

Anastasia: “If you’re talkin’ ‘bout what’s right or wrong, then I don’t think it’s right to keep a Sin Archbishop alive. If I could just kill this guy and get our Memories of Julius back, that’d be swell. But I got a pet theory ‘bout that.”

Subaru: “A pet theory…?”

Anastasia: “Whether someone should be alive or not, snatchin’ and robbin’ ‘em of it should only be done as a last resort—— A person who can easily kill another human being won’t meet a good end. It ain’t one of Hoshin’s sayings, but one of my own.”

Subaru’s eyes widened after hearing Anastasia’s words.

In this fantasy world of swords and magic, there was such a rebellious, naïve way of thinking. But at the same time, the moral side of Subaru felt like she was right.

Subaru also believed that the less people died, the better.

It did not go only for his allies; it would be better if there were less enemies dying.

However, that way of thinking was only limited to cases where the other person deserved mercy.

Subaru: “He has caused so much misfortune for so many people, and has continued to torment everyone until now… Do you still think we shouldn’t kill a guy like that, Anastasia?”

Anastasia: “When it’s the right time to kill someone, kill ‘em. When I need to make a decision, and the situation’s dire, I’ll dirty my hands. But it ain’t right to leave it to impulse—— I think you’re that kinda guy, Natsuki-kun.”

Subaru: “That kind of thing, is…”

Anastasia: “’Cause of that, ya can shed tears for someone else who’s been lost… I’d prefer to have a long-lasting association with that kinda Natsuki-kun, rather than a cold-blooded, heartless one.”

Anastasia ran her fingers across her cheek, pointing out Subaru’s tears.

Instantly, Subaru lowered his gaze, the wound in his heart due to losing Shaula aching. Anastasia's statement had been mean. But it had been, without a doubt, quite effective.

Emilia: "…Subaru, I also share the same opinion as Anastasia-san. Taking the sleeping Rem and Julius into account, I want to hurry up and resolve things, but…"

Julius: "No need to worry about me, at least. Having gotten to this point, doing what is right is far more important than making hasty decisions… This also concerns my younger brother, after all."

They were on the brink of recovering the Memories of Joshua, who had been left in Pristella, and Julius had been extremely cautious—— but, as had already been mentioned before, that was the correct choice.

In order to make up for their pain and sense of loss, he was eager to get results. That was probably how Subaru felt right now.

Echidna: "Let's summarize it then. Ana and Julius's opinion is that we should move Roy Alphard… The Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, to the Royal Capital to find a way to save the victims of his Authority. He will not be pardoned after that, either. He should not be able to escape capital punishment."

Anastasia: "There are limits to how much they can pardon on the grounds of age. That's how it may end up in the end."

After seeing Subaru unclenching his fist, Echidna and Anastasia got the story in order.

Emilia had no objections to the treatment of Alphard. He would be taken to the Royal Capital in a sealed state, so, in a sense, he would be in the same position as Sirius, who had been taken there not too long ago.

Anastasia: "Emilia-san and everyone else, do ya think that'll be aight?"

Emilia: "Yeah. I also want to remember the people who've been forgotten."

Upon being asked that by Anastasia, as to confirm her intentions, Emilia lifted her head and answered in a dignified manner.

Subaru was incapable of forming a rebuttal to her words, feeling somewhat hopeful and bitter at the same time, and then turned away from the Sin Archbishop in the dragon carriage and suddenly fell to his knees.

Subaru: "Ah…"

Beatrice: "Subaru! Ahh, geez, you were pushing yourself as Betty thought, in fact! It's only natural for you to become like this when you've been feeling terrible for so long, I suppose!"

Supporting Subaru's shoulders as his head felt heavy and his vision became unclear, Beatrice yelled angrily at him.

Her adorable voice rang in his head, and he realized he had been expending more of his energy than he'd thought.

It was natural that she would say it was natural.

He had lost his memories, and died many times while they were gone, came face-to-face with himself in order to recover his memories, fought against the five obstacles that plagued the Tower upon waking up, used his Authority to take on the burdens of his friends in battle, and lost Shaula at the end of it all——

He had exhausted his mind and body well past their limits.

He had only been there for a few days, but it felt like he had spent more than five years in the Tower[325].

Subaru: "——Ah, I…"

Emilia: "Subaru, relax, it's alright, so. Can you be good now and rest for a little while? Let's talk about things when you wake up. I have a lot of things I want to say to you, too."

Subaru, who had collapsed on the spot, losing all strength, was being hugged from the front by Emilia. Her soft touch and sweet scent, which would normally cause his body to stiffen, were as effective as a powerful drug for him now, causing his consciousness to quickly descend into darkness.

[325] Yet another possible snide fourth wall break. Arc 6 started with the publication of Chapter 1 on August of 2015, and Chapter 90 was published on November of 2020, spanning five years. Hence why this figure in narration.

If he were to die now in the darkness, would he go back to an earlier point where he was running around the Tower trying to find a way to save Shaula?

But that was impossible. He half-understood it would be impossible, but he could not help but hope for it.

Slowly, Subaru's consciousness was swallowed up by the darkness.

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Emilia: "Heave-ho!"

Lifting Subaru's unconscious body, Emilia sighed.

Subaru's eyes were shut tight, and he was breathing laborious breaths, both testaments to how hard he had toiled to solve the problems in the Watchtower.

Those showed just how desperate Subaru had been to save Emilia and the others.

At the time he rushed to her side after Batenkaitos had taken her Name, making her be forgotten by everyone, Emilia had been so, so happy.

She wanted to tell him that in clear terms.

She hoped Subaru, hardworking as he was, would not blame himself too much.

Subaru was not responsible for what had happened to Shaula.

It was Emilia's and everyone else's responsibility, but to be more precise——

Emilia: "——I think her Master, Flugel, was a bad person."

The person who had pushed the achievements of the Sage onto Shaula, and the one responsible for her being put to sleep in tandem with the overhaul in the roles of the Pleiades Watchtower.

Even if he was one of the Three Great Heroes who had saved the world, from the moment he had made Subaru cry and Shaula desolate on, he joined the ranks of villains in Emilia's mind.

Of course, since she would never have a chance to talk to him, there was no one who could relieve her of this feeling of frustration.

Anastasia: "Looks like he's pretty fatigued… but it ain't a big problem. He'll recover if he rests. Ya goin' to that Green Room?"

Emilia: "Yeah. Ram and some others are there too… Weren't you looking after Rem when she came to help me, Anastasia-san?"

Anastasia: "Nothin' so grandiose, yeah? Once I recovered my self, I just saw off Julius, who was goin' to help Natsuki-kun, and Ram-san, who was gonna go help out Emilia-san… I'm afraid to say that Rem hasn't shown any changes at all."

Emilia: "I see…"

Thinking of Ram, Rem, and Patrasche waiting in the Green Room, Emilia wrinkled her finely-shaped eyebrows.

The slaying of Batenkaitos had been done as revenge for Rem in a sense, who had been bereaved of her Name and Memories. However, the only thing that mattered was that she'd wake up, and since that had not been achieved, whether they had managed to get their revenge or not was unimportant.

That was at least something Ram would say without any sort of hesitation. The only thing that mattered to her was getting Rem back.

Julius: "I hope Roy Alphard can tell us something about that, too. There are too many unanswered questions about this Watchtower…no, about the Great Library Pleiades."

Beatrice: "The Great Library is all-knowing… That is the claim Shaula made, in fact. She was a carefree girl, but because of that, she did not play around with words, I suppose. She said this was the Great Library, so there's no reason to doubt that, in fact.

Whether its function as a Great Library was restricted to just the Books of the Dead, or if it possessed other functions, was what they needed to find out.

Based on that, Emilia had something to say to Beatrice and the others.

Emilia: “Well, after taking Subaru to the Green Room to rest, there’s a place I want to go with everyone… There’s someone I’d like everyone to meet.”

Beatrice: “…Is it related to the First Floor, I suppose?”

Climbing onto the First Floor, Emilia had broken through the last Examination.

This was something Beatrice and the others already knew about. The problem was that she had yet to reveal everything.

Specifically, what had been on the First Floor? Who had she met? What had Emilia done there?

Since it was bizarre, out-of-this-world, and difficult to express in words——

Emilia: “It won’t take long to tell you about it, but it’s very complex, so how about we just meet them in person and talk about it?”

Said Emilia, pointing at the top of the Tower, far above her.

△▼△▼△▼△

???: “——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner.”

Everyone: “————”

After being guided by Emilia to the highest floor of the Pleiades Watchtower——to the First Floor, everyone was overwhelmed, rendered speechless by the massive Dragon’s greeting.

Seeing the look on everyone’s faces, Emilia said, “Very surprising, right?” and continued whilst craning her neck,

Emilia: “When I got to the First Floor and saw Volcanica waiting here, I was reaaally surprised…”

Beatrice: “No, no, hold on, hold on a second, I suppose. T-this isn’t a problem that can be solved simply by being surprised, in fact!”

In front of the Divine Dragon covered in azure scales, Beatrice let out a panicky voice unbefitting of her appearance.

She was swinging her hands up and down as if she were completely restless. However, she was not the only one in a shocked state.

Julius: “This… is…”

Anastasia: “Wooow~, somethin’ has appeared that not even I could’ve anticipated. What’s goin’ on here? Didn’t’cha say that the Divine Dragon-san was beyond the Great Waterfall?”

Echidna: “That should be the case. According to the prophecy from the Dragon History Stone, in the same year the Royal Selection comes to an end, it will renew the Covenant with Ana, who will have become Lugunica’s Monarch.”

Next to Julius, who had been rendered speechless, even the calm Anastasia could barely hide her cold sweat. Around her neck, the sound of Echidna’s voice was also slightly higher in pitch.

However, after being late in reacting to the ladies’ response, Julius fixed his posture and said, “Excuse me”,

Julius: “Oh Great Divine Dragon, who defends our Kingdom. We deeply apologize for our rudeness in the presence of your esteemed self, Volcanica-sama, bearer of the Covenant who has maintained it for so long and given us much aid.”

Volcanica: “————”

Julius: “Although it is like this, it is such an honor to meet you. I am Julius Juukulius, a member of the Royal Guard of the Kingdom of Lugunica. I have made sure to keep many of your treasured tales in the depths of my heart.”

Julius, who had kneeled down and bowed, had removed his sword from his waist and placed it on the ground next to him as a form of the utmost respect.

And so, as a Knight who served the Dragon Kingdom, he showed the greatest courtesy to the Divine Dragon. Accepting that, narrowing his golden eyes, Volcanica said,

Volcanica: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

Julius: "My life, my faith, have all been dedicated to Anastasia Hoshin-sama. The one who will be the next Monarch, and forge the next Covenant, will surely be Anastasia-sama… Kuh."

Anastasia: "J-Julius, are ya cryin'?"

Still on his knees, Julius was unable to keep the tears at bay, distressing Anastasia. Wiping his tears away with the back of his hand, to his master's words he said, "My apologies", and,

Julius: "Not only did I get to exchange words with one of the Three Great Heroes, Reid Astrea, but I was also able to meet the Divine Dragon, Volcanica. As a Knight of the Kingdom of Lugunica, I could not be any more honored… This tower, what in the world is it?"

Julius's voice trembled, due to having experienced something awe-inspiring.

With a tinge of remorse, as if she were ruining his special moment, Emilia started to say "About that…",

Emilia: "Julius, I'm reaaally hesitant to tell you this because you're so happy, but…"

Julius: "——My apologies, Emilia-sama. Disregarding you and Anastasia-sama, I attempted to talk with the Divine Dragon without permission…"

Emilia: "Mhmm, don't worry about it. It's just that, Volcanica is…"

Trying to explain things to Julius without hurting him, Emilia struggled to find the right words to say. Then, coming from above her head——

Volcanica: "——Thou, who hath reached the top of the Tower. Step forth through the First Floor, almighty petitioner."

Anastasia: "…Wait a sec. This line, I feel like I heard it just now."

Hearing him repeat those words, Anastasia was the first to harbor suspicion.

However, that same feeling spread to the others, too. Saying that was a natural thing to do was natural in itself; everyone had immediately noticed the unusual occurrence, Volcanica continuing to repeat the same words over and over again. And——

Emilia: "Although that's Volcanica, it's been waiting here for so long that they became a bit senile. Since its body is still full of energy, they're a reaaally rowdy one though…"

Volcanica, who had a pretty bad case of dementia, still possessed the true power of a Dragon, but over the course of a long period of time, their mind had become damaged.

Perhaps because of the Examination of the First Floor, the Divine Dragon had put out a display of its tremendous power to stop Emilia from getting up the pillar, but once Emilia had reached the Monolith, it had judged that she had passed the Examination, thus returned to its original position.

Moreover, although the Examination had ended, it still continued to talk about the Examination.

Julius: "The Great Divine Dragon is senile…?"

Anastasia: "J-Julius, calm down. Come on, you're a little tired, aren't'cha? Why don't'cha sit down?"

Julius was left extremely shocked by Emilia's words.

After Reid, the second legend he had encountered also differed from the stories he had heard about them, causing his knees to tremble.

Emilia also wished to not disappoint Julius, whose eyes had been sparkling, so somehow felt a dull pain in her chest. But——

Beatrice: "Emilia, that's probably not the case, I suppose. This isn't some kind of dementia, in fact."

Emilia: "Huh?"

Anastasia: "Echidna, I'm sure you can feel it too, I suppose. This isn't dementia…"

Echidna: “Ah, yes. I was not sure at first, but I feel it now. This is not the wearing down of the mind, but the emptiness of the spirit.”

Emilia: “Emptiness, of the spirit…?”

Emilia was puzzled by the conversation going on between the Artificial Spirits Echidna and Beatrice, who could understand one another.

With puzzled expressions on the faces of Julius and Anastasia both, Beatrice held out her finger and said, “It’s simple, in fact”,

Beatrice: “Its spirit is empty… That’s to say, there’s nothing inside, I suppose. As a result, they’re limited in what they can say and respond with, in fact. Just think of it as them being ninety-percent asleep, I suppose.”

Emilia: “Ninety-percent… But it was reaaally strong, though?”

Echidna: “If its spirit were present, it would have been incomparable.”

Echidna’s tone implied that she had been lucky to survive, making Emilia shudder in response.

Emilia had just barely survived that desperate battle with the help of her ice soldiers. Surprisingly, that had just been akin to fighting with a half-asleep Volcanica.

Although being half-asleep and being senile were similar, they were completely different in nature.

Beatrice: “But even if its spirit isn’t there, it still has the body of the Divine Dragon, I suppose. If that’s the case, then there may be a way to help the people of Pristella, in fact.”

Emilia: “——! A way to help everyone? How can we do that?”

Anastasia: “——I see. We can get the blood of a Dragon from the Divine Dragon.”

Anastasia snapped her fingers, and Beatrice nodded at her words.

Upon hearing that, Emilia also widened her eyes and let out an “Ah”.

The source of all the tales that had been passed down in the Kingdom of Lugunica was none other than the blood of the Divine Dragon Volcanica.

It had been said that the Dragon's Blood was a miracle elixir that could revive a barren land, ensure a bountiful harvest, and heal all illnesses and injuries. To put it simply, many remarkable effects of it had been recorded.

And, beyond that. The Dragon's Blood was an element that Emilia was unable to ignore——

Emilia: "If I can get some blood from Volcanica…"

Emilia's reason for participating in the Royal Selection—— it was to obtain the Dragon's Blood kept by the Kingdom of Lugunica, and utilize it to thaw the frozen soil of the Great Forest of Elior.

In order to liberate her people, who had been frozen in that forest because of her power going wild, Emilia had resolved to partake in the Royal Selection.

Emilia: "————"

The realization that her main purpose in participating in that battle had a possibility of being achieved at this moment hit her.

It made Emilia astonished, making her hold her breath.

If she were able to receive Volcanica's blood here, then Emilia would no longer have a reason to ascend to the throne——[326]

Emilia: "I…"

Beatrice: "…Emilia, sorry to have confused you, I suppose. The Blood you're thinking about is different from this blood, from Volcanica's blood, in fact. That's why you won't be able to achieve that, I suppose."

[326] Author's note (relevant here): "«It's odd that the effect of the Dragon's Blood is unknown to Emilia!», so some pointed out to me, and to them I say «That's true!», so with that as the reason, I've amended the relevant portion". Basically, he somewhat screwed up here initially, and later corrected it. More of a fun tidbit, in honesty.

So said Beatrice to Emilia, who was about to lose her meaning in participating in the Royal Selection.

Emilia then looked at her with rounded eyes and said “Huh?”,

Emilia: “What do you mean I won’t be able to achieve that? I’ve studied reaaally hard, you know. In order to melt the ice in the Forest, I need the Dragon’s Blood that is in the Castle. So…”

Beatrice: “There’s nothing wrong with that idea, in fact. However, as I stated earlier, the Blood in Lugunica’s Royal Castle and the blood of Volcanica are, strictly speaking, not the same… The Dragon’s Blood in the Royal Castle is the blood that spilled from the last beat of a dying Dragon’s heart, I suppose.”

Emilia: “The last drop of blood… from the heart?”

Hearing things she had never heard before, Emilia frowned, scrunching up her finely-shaped eyebrows. Beatrice nodded in silence, then Julius raised his hand and stated, “May I ask a question?”.

Julius, who seemed to have just barely recovered from the shock of hearing about the existence or nonexistence of the Divine Dragon’s spirit, looked up at it, whose responses remained unchanged——

Julius: “Excuse me, Beatrice-sama, but what do you mean by what you just said? I am also a Knight belonging to the Royal Guard of the Kingdom of Lugunica. My ears pick up many things regarding the Kingdom. However, the thing you just said…”

Beatrice: “——As its heart beat one last time, the blood from its heart was poured into a container. That blood, as the true Dragon’s Blood, was entrusted to the Royal Castle in order to serve as proof of the Covenant between man and Dragon.”

Julius: “————”

Beatrice: “It’s no surprise that you do not know this, in fact. The words I said just now came from a book that had been sealed within the Forbidden Library… An account left by the Witch of Greed, Echidna, whose name no longer lingers in the world at large, I suppose.”

After hearing Beatrice’s response, Julius gasped, his eyes widening.

As a Knight of the Kingdom, he did not even know about that, but if it came from Beatrice, he could not consider it a lie. And if that were to be the truth——

Julius: “Then, the Dragon’s Blood being kept in the Royal Castle of Lugunica is the blood of which Dragon? The last beating of the heart would mean…”

Anastasia: “It’d be strange if the Dragon who left the blood didn’t die… In that case, it wouldn’t make sense for it to have come from the empty-headed Divine Dragon-san.”

Julius and Anastasia voiced their doubts, but they were also justified in doing so.

If the Dragon’s Blood came from the last beat of its heart, then it would not belong to Volcanica. Also, if that blood still possessed tremendous power——

Beatrice: “Unfortunately, it wasn’t mentioned in the book, in fact.”

Echidna: “…That person is always doing things half-heartedly. From what I can tell, that Witch of Greed is the biggest reason why Natsuki-kun is so cold to me, right? Because of that, he does not have a good impression of me, and now that impression is only getting amplified.”

Beatrice: “Speaking ill of Mother won’t be allowed, I suppose. Mind your words, in fact.”

Emilia: “Don’t fight like that, you two! But, erm, it’s right…”

After scolding the two of them, who were getting heated with each other because of having a difference of opinion regarding Echidna’s nature, Emilia silently lowered her head.

Upon first hearing that Volcanica’s blood was different from the Dragon’s Blood in the Royal Castle, Emilia had been surprised. And yet, at the same time, she was relieved.

Emilia: “…That’s a reaaally strange thing.”

Emilia’s number one goal was to help everyone in the Forest. This goal remained unchanged even now. Therefore, if she were able to obtain Volcanica’s blood here and use it as a solution, it would be possible to liberate everyone in the Great Forest of Elior using it.

However, while she wanted to do so, Emilia was hesitant.

——If she were to use another means to melt the eternal glaciation plaguing the Great Forest of Elior, would she step off the stage and stop her participation in the Royal Selection?

Emilia: “————”

Anastasia: “…Emilia-san’s concerns aside, if the words Beatrice-san speaks are true, can anythin’ be done with Volcanica-san’s blood? There’s a high possibility of it bein’ a disappointment, right?”

Beatrice: “Whether he’s become useless, senile, or lost his spirit, they still are the Divine Dragon, I suppose. So its blood is without a doubt quite powerful as well, in fact. It’s just that…”

Emilia: “It wouldn’t be enough to melt everyone’s ice, right?”

In response to Emilia’s question, Beatrice gave her an apologetic look and nodded her head.

Gazing at the appearance of Beatrice who looked sadder than herself, Emilia relaxed her lips, raised her face much as if she weren’t downhearted, and said, “It’s okay”,

Emilia: “That fact is reaaally disappointing. But, since it was something that happened so suddenly, I was so surprised that I didn’t realize it… So, it’s not a big deal.”

Beatrice: “Sorry, I suppose. Betty should’ve told you about it, in fact… The Divine Dragon being in a place like this was unexpected, I suppose. It’s truly regrettable, in fact.”

Emilia: “Yeah, that’s right. It’s such a troubling thing.”

Beatrice’s face sunk in a way that did not suit her, and Emilia puffed up her chest.

In honest truth, she really did feel disappointed. However, what she had said to Beatrice was also the truth. Rather, it felt as if she had been told she could not take shortcuts or cheat.

Echidna: “Then, let’s get back to the question at hand. With the Blood of the Divine Dragon, there is a possibility of restoring those in Pristella who have had their appearances changed due to the Authority of Lust. As Beatrice stated, even if he does not have a spirit, the blood itself should still contain great power.”

Anastasia: “It’s been said that a single drop of the Dragon’s Blood in the Castle could revitalize a wasteland. It’s a powerful medicine, ain’t it?”

Julius: “Therefore, it would be essential to dilute it thousands of times.”

Echidna: “But it is a pretty big improvement compared to having nothing at all. If the stories about it being a miracle medicine that works on everything are true, then it is worth giving it a shot.”

After hearing the conversation going on between Echidna, Anastasia, and Julius, Emilia once again felt hopeful.

They had crossed the Augria Sand Dunes in order to help those who had suffered misfortune.

If they could find a way to solve the problems caused by Lust and Gluttony both, that would be best.

Otherwise, there would be no way to reward Subaru for all of the damage he had suffered.

Emilia: “I’m reaaally selfish…”

It was very selfish of her, to want to make Shaula’s sacrifice have meaning.

She had spent a long time in this Tower, following her own thoughts and desires. It had been Shaula herself who had made it meaningful, not Emilia.

Emilia: “Mm, I got it. I’ll go and ask Volcanica about it. But it may not understand me at all and go on a rampage if I try to take its blood.”

Beatrice: “You’ll get tired of hearing them, I suppose. Emilia, the Pleiades Watchtower is now under your jurisdiction as its new administrator, in fact. Can you do something with it, I wonder?”

Emilia: “Under my jurisdiction as the administrator… I still don’t have any awareness of that, at all.”

The mystery of the Third Floor had been solved, she had broken through Reid on the Second Floor, and expressed her will to Volcanica on the First Floor.

Based on these conditions alone, that Emilia had traversed to the Watchtower on foot could be spoken with certainty. However, if she were to say whether she was able to see any obvious changes, the answer would be no.

What she could vaguely perceive now, was——

Emilia: “The Sand Dunes leading to the Watchtower will no longer reject anyone… I think?”

Anastasia: “Is that the choice ya made, Emilia-san? Isn’t that kinda statement sorta risky, since the Books of the Dead are real troublesome stuff?”

Emilia: “They may be dangerous, but I think we can handle it if we’re careful and use them properly. I think there are still lots of things that can’t be decided on our own.”

For Emilia and the others, it would be too difficult to draw any conclusions about the Tower since they were too few in number.

For better or worse, she and the others did not have the power to do anything about this place. Therefore, it would be best to let more capable people figure it out.

Emilia: “That’s what I think. Do you not agree with it?”

Echidna: “…I feel like you are putting a little too much hope in others, but this is the conclusion you came to. If Ana and Julius do not object to it, then neither will I.”

Emilia: “Thank you, Echidna.”

Emilia thanked Echidna, first to agree with her, in that manner.

Anastasia also spoke up with a “Got it, got it”,

Anastasia: “I ain’t gonna object to it, either. Actually, even if we made an effort to hide it, it’d be difficult to make the most of it… If that’s the case, it’d be best to share what we found after trekkin’ all the way here. There’s the issue of Gluttony, and we might be able to bring the Dragon’s Blood back, too.”

Julius: “We should not be vile, nor expect too much. The most important thing is that it was Emilia-sama who reached the top of the Tower. We should respect her wishes.”

Emilia: “Anastasia-san, Julius as well, thank you!”

After receiving the two’s agreement, Emilia thanked them with a smile. Then she finally looked back at Beatrice, who had yet to express her opinion on the matter,

Emilia: “How about you, Beatrice? Do you think this is too irresponsible?”

Beatrice: “If you’re talking about being responsible or irresponsible, abandoning this place without investigating it is the most irresponsible thing we could do, in fact. Betty does not object, I suppose. Betty is personally interested in this as well, I suppose.”

Emilia: “I’m glad!”

She placed her hand on her chest, relieved that one of her closest companions did not disagree with her.

They should be able to find a good way of making best use out of the Watchtower, by utilizing the wisdom from everyone assembled; of that, she was sure.

Emilia: “Okay, next up is the issue of the blood… The easiest way to go about it is to take Volcanica with us.”

Anastasia: “I think that’ll cause a lotta problems.”

It was true that Volcanica was rather large, so if they were to take it alongside in their return, there was a possibility that it would bump into a lot of things. However, since Volcanica could fly, it could just fly in the air when they entered a street, and so they would not have to worry about it bumping into anything.

Emilia: “Erm, Volcanica. Can you come with us? Or, if you have to stay here, I’d like for you to share some of your blood with me…”

Volcanica: *“————”*

Emilia: “Volcanica?”

Half expecting something to happen, half giving up, thinking that Volcanica would only repeat the lines from the Examination, Emilia frowned at his present reaction.

Volcanica, having returned to his original position on the First Floor, was nowleaning against the central pillar; slowly, the Divine Dragon raised his head, and turned his gaze to some place other than the Tower.

He neither responded to Emilia and the others, nor did he show any sort of aggression.

Emilia, at least, felt like his behavior was rather peculiar. And at the same time——

Emilia: “What?”

Feeling a tingling sensation, as if a cold finger had traced along the entirety of her back, Emilia quickly turned her gaze in the direction of the cause of that chilly feeling—— the direction of Volcanica’s gaze, east of the Tower.

East of the Tower, past the end of the sand sea, was the Great Waterfall at the world’s edge—— no, what existed there was the Great Waterfall, as well as a special place. That was——

△▼△▼△▼△

???: “Ugh…”

Feeling something rough gently brushing against his face, Subaru opened his eyes whilst groaning.

His vision was blurry, but after blinking a few times a clear outline appeared, and what came into view was the cause of that rough sensation—— Patrasche’s face. She had been licking his face with her red tongue.

Subaru: “…Is that you, Patrasche?”

Patrasche “————”

Subaru: “Sorry for making you worry… You risked your life again, didn’t you? Sorry for always making things hard for you.”

Relaxing his lips, Subaru gently put his hand on his beloved ground dragon’s sorrowful face and began stroking its sharp face.

This jet-black ground dragon had always saved him when he was in tough spots. Not to mention that he was indebted to her for having saved him when he had amnesia, in this last loop, the role Patrasche had been entrusted with was one of great, great importance. To put it simply——

???: “If Patrasche had not been here, Rem would have been in peril. Bringing this girl back home is probably the greatest accomplishment of Barusu’s life.”

Subaru: “Even if it’s true, don’t diss me like that! I took Beako out and got Emilia-tan’s Insignia back, too. Although Roswaal was involved in both of those, you know.”

As a matter of fact, Roswaal had been unrelated to the problem of Beatrice, but saying that would have been confrontational to the other person, so he did not dare saying it.

And, as expected, Ram clicked her tongue in disgust with a “Tch” upon hearing that.

Ram was leaning against the wall of the Green Room, her arms wrapped around herself. Subaru narrowed his eyes in pain upon seeing her bruised body.

It was clear that the battle against Ley Batenkaitos had been an intense one.

Since Meili had been injured halfway through, the amount of burdens Subaru could shoulder had been reduced, which had been one of the reasons why she’d had to fight such a hard battle in the first place.

Not sure of what to say, Subaru opened his mouth to apologize——

Subaru: “Hey, Ram. It was my fault that you got hurt like this… Blughhh!”

Ram: “Do not speak such stupid words. Barusu being responsible for Ram’s injuries? In Ram’s life, there is not the slightest bit in which Barusu has been a pivotal factor. How repulsive.”

Subaru: “What’s repulsive is you talking like that! You stuffing lumps of grass into a person’s mouth is even scarier!”

As he pulled the lump of ivy that had been shoved into his mouth Subaru protested, his eyes watering due to the grassy odor. Hearing that, Ram responded with an unapologetic “Ha”.

Towards the argument going on between Ram and Subaru, the light sound of giggling could be heard.

???: “Onii-san and onee-san, you look like such close frieeends. It’s like watching two sibliiings.”

So said Meili, who’d spread her legs out on the grass mattress covering the floor, the Mini-Crimson Scorpion perched on her head.

Faced with Meili’s giggles, and the words she’d said, Ram made an easy-to-understand grimace,

Ram: “Barusu, my younger sibling…? Even if that were true, and the same blood circulated in us, the Oni Village would cull a useless little brother like him.”

Subaru: “Is the Oni Village really so severe? I’m glad I wasn’t born as an Oni…”

Ram: “That was just a joke. But, it is just that Ram could not stand the horror and would have you culled.”

Subaru: “Don’t make it more complicated by doubling up on your assumptions!”

Spit flying, Subaru shouted that at Ram, who was acting like she usually did.

Having said that, he could now see that it was just her roundabout way of showing consideration for him. She had stated that the cause of her injuries was not due to his decision, after all.

It was difficult for him to presume upon that consideration. But if he were stubborn and insisted that he was the one responsible, he would instead incur Ram’s ire.

Subaru: “You’re such a troublesome girl, nee-sama…”

Ram: “After Meili’s presumptuous remark just now, kindly stop calling Ram «nee-sama». It would be troublesome if someone we met for the first time had a misunderstanding.”

Getting the usual cold reply and the Ram experience, Subaru looked around the room—— at the faces inside the Green Room. Subaru and Patrasche were there, as well as Ram and Meili, along with the Mini-Crimson Scorpion. And at the back of the room, was the Sleeping Beauty lying on a bed——

Subaru: “——Rem…is she not awake?”

Ram: “Lamentably, it seems. I beheaded that odious, insolent person. Emilia-sama’s stuff seems to have returned because of that…”

Subaru: “Julius’s stuff hasn’t returned, and neither has Rem’s… Is there anything we’re missing?”

Pressing his fist firmly into his palm, Subaru reflected upon on his bitter feelings.

Just before losing consciousness, he had once again confirmed that in the conversation with Emilia and the others—— In the end, in order to completely eradicate the damage caused by Gluttony, they would need talk to them directly and wring the information out of them.

Subaru: “Are the ones here based on the severity of their injuries? Where are Emilia-tan and the others?”

Meili: “If you’re talking about onee-san and Beatrice-san, they said they were going up there to meet someoneee. Way up on the First Floor, way, way up there… Who might be up there? Ram-oneesan must know, riiight?”

Ram: “Nothing to be concerned with. However, there is someone large, old and senile, there.”

Subaru: “Someone large, old and senile at the top of the Watchtower would definitely be an important *suuyounajin*[327]…”

Hearing that a new character was present there, Subaru furrowed his eyebrows.

Who was the old and senile person that Ram was talking about? Or, if they were an Examiner like Reid on the Second Floor, then——

Subaru: “——It can’t be Flugel, right?”

Ram: “Barusu.”

Subaru: “If Flugel’s the one up there, I’ll never forgive him. I’ve enough to say to that guy to fill a whole mountain. If it weren’t for him, Shaula…”

Ram: “Barusu, please calm down.”

Subaru: “Calm down? You, Ram, that kind of thing, Shaula…”

While he was trying to determine the true identity of the old man on the top floor of the Tower, causing him to put strength into his knees, the cheek of the vigorous and rash Subaru was slapped. The cause was Ram’s palm, who had approached him.

[327] Engrish flip. Means “key character” (枢要な人), originally “キーキャラ” (key character).

Having been slapped on the face, Subaru widened his eyes and looked at Ram with a dumbfounded expression.

Ram: “Stop using Shaula as revenge for your own powerlessness.”

Subaru: “————”

Ram: “I heard of Shaula. She was obnoxious and unmannered, and the eyes that admired Barusu were rotten… But she was not so bad that she deserved to disappear.”

As she spoke, Ram gently placed her hand on Subaru’s struck cheek.

The side that had been hit was hot, but Ram’s palm was cold. While absorbing the heat, Ram continued her words to the speechless Subaru.

Ram: “If you cannot accept it, then, rather than getting angry, just cry. Shaula would be happier if you wept in desolation over her, as opposed to using her as a reason for your anger—— Because Ram is the same way.”

Subaru: “Ram…”

Ram: “Though Ram still believes you are mixing up the one you should be caring so much for with someone else.”

After getting one last word in, Ram flicked Subaru’s forehead with her finger. That painless force made Subaru fall onto his butt, and, as he placed his hand on his forehead, said “My bad…”.

Regaining his composure, Flugel being on the First Floor could just be called Subaru’s own desire, or even something like paranoia. But supposing Flugel really was there——

Ram: “Before Barusu could do anything, Emilia-sama and Ram would beat him until he was on the cusp of death.”

Subaru: “…I can see you doing that, but not Emilia-tan.”

When thinking of Shaula, the amount of anger he directed at Flugel was by no means small, and everyone in the Tower naturally shared that feeling.

With Ram's affirmation, Subaru let out a long exhale.

In that case, he was curious as to who the senile old person on the First Floor was.

Ram: "Let's put that aside for now. If we assume that senile old person can be helpful in some way, then we should ask him about the victims of the Sin Archbishop of Lust, not Gluttony."

Subaru: "That's a pretty big deal… I see…"

In that regard, Ram clearly had her priorities straight. Being able to advocate for such a thing without hesitation was one of Ram's finest qualities.

And Subaru could also resonate with her ideas, to a certain extent.

The prospect of being able to save the victims of Lust was attractive, but.

Meili: "But, Ram-oneesan, did you have something else in mind when saying thaaat?"

However, Meili cast those words towards Subaru's face as he admonished himself. She poked the Mini-Crimson Scorpion on her head with her finger and said,

Meili: "Didn't you say sooo? That the effects of Gluttony have something to do with time or something like thaaat."

Ram: "——What a loose-lipped girl. In that case, it will be necessary to discipline you properly once we return home."

Meili: "Kyaaa, so scaryyy."

Meili held her head and stuck out her tiny tongue. Above her head, the Mini-Crimson Scorpion aimed its pincers and stinger at Ram, as if trying to protect her. However, under Ram's icy gaze, it quickly shrunk into a little ball.

In that flustered behavior, he could sense a part of her previous self——

Subaru: "Ram, that hypothesis is? What's it about?"

Ram: “It does not amount to much. However, it has been said that Gluttony eats the Memories of others, correct? If they are truly treated like food, Ram is of the belief that digestion is affected by time.”

Subaru: “Digestion…”

Ram: “Emilia-sama was plundered, and after a few hours, they came back. If so, then what about the other victims such as Knight Julius, the people of Pristella, and Rem?”

Subaru: “——Ah.”

After hearing Ram stating that hypothesis with a finger raised, Subaru’s eyes widened due to how uncomplicated it was.

Just as she had declared, the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony had equated the pilfering of Names and Memories to eating. If that were not just a metaphorical expression, then he could find Ram’s hypothesis to be an acceptable one.

It took time for the Names and Memories that were stolen away to be digested. Then, the reason why Emilia’s Name had returned, and others’ had not, was because——

Subaru: “…There’s no way, has everything already been digested?”

Ram: “——It is uncertain. There is a possibility that it might just take time for them to come back. If that is the case, then there is hope. The Memories of Julius, and of the other victims… and of Rem, will hopefully come back, too.”

Subaru: “————”

As to whether that was to be interpreted as a bad thing or a good thing, Ram made no further explanations.

Subaru understood Ram’s thoughts as well. This was a question with no immediate answer.

However, now that Batenkaitos had been slain and Alphard had been captured, Subaru had another big thing to worry about—— no, it was something that had come up once again.

Subaru: “Louis Arneb…”

The final Gluttony that he had come across in the Hall of Memories by chance, had been left behind in that place.

Was that young girl, who did not possess her own body, who had taken over the bodies of her two brothers as well as Natsuki Subaru's in order to commit evil deeds, really the object of a Witch Factor?

Her abilities were comparable to those held by Gluttony.

However, if the life of the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony was needed to undo the damage caused by their Authority, then how could he defeat Louis, who was in that place? In the first place——

Subaru: "Does the concept of dying exist in that place or not?"

In that place, one would exist as a spiritual entity, rather than exist in a physical body brought alongside.

He may be able to emulate an idea from *manga* and games and apply it to cause mental death, but would death of the mind be enough to release a Witch Factor?

Whether it was that place or Louis who remained there, nothing about them was clear.

Moreover, even if an answer could be garnered——

Subaru: "When Julius defeated Reid, Reid's role in the Examination was terminated. If that's the case, then wouldn't Reid go back into his blank Book of the Dead?"

Subaru had managed to go to the place known as the Hall of Memories within the cradle of Od Lagna. And the reason why he had managed to do so was because of an empty Book of the Dead that just happened to lead to that place.

Since the soul of Reid Astrea had been used in the Examination, there had been a gap in his Book of the Dead, which was connected to the Hall of Memories. If that was no longer there——

Natsuki Subaru, had possibly lost the opportunity to defeat Louis Arneb.

Subaru: "————"

Subaru was overthinking it; he understood that he needed to confirm the possibility that Reid's Book of the Dead was still blank. Not only that, Subaru also had the plan of challenging his own Book of the Dead. That was a trump card, one that would connect him to the Hall of Memories.

Although he would have to go through the hell of watching his own Deaths again, it was better than closing himself off to other possibilities. He thought it would be much better for him to do so.

In comparison to giving up because of how many irreversible mistakes he had committed——

Ram: "——Such a fool."

Subaru: "Nee-sama?"

Ram: "If you have the leisure to worry about such frivolous things, then it would be much better for you to rest your mind and body so you can think properly—— Barusu was not the only one who failed to choose the most excellent answer in this Tower."

Shaking her head, Ram gently touched her forehead.

Remaining in the place her horn previously would grow from, was a slim scar. After doing so, she stretched out that same finger towards Rem, who was on the bed.

She then lovingly caressed her sister's forehead, and,

Ram: "For the purpose of defeating the Sin Archbishop of Gluttony, Ram borrowed Rem's power. Though victory was achieved in the end, it came at a cost… This girl must have paid a heavy burden, right?"

Subaru: "Heavy burden…"

Ram: "Ram performed how she would back when she had her horn. Were it you, Barusu, your body would probably explode from the inside out."

Subaru, who had taken on Ram's usual burdens before, knew very well that these were not exaggerated words. The simple acts of breathing and moving conservatively made Ram experience the taste of hell.

That was just how serious she had gotten—— What sort of recoil would be gotten from it?

It would be no exaggeration to say that, had Subaru taken it on, a part of his body would suffer from so much damage that it would never be able to recover.

After Ram had told him that she had made Rem take on her burdens, she closed her eyes, revealing her long eyelashes.

However, she continued with, “Does that make sense?”,

Ram: “Because of this, Rem might feel resentment towards me when she wakes up. However, Ram will not regret it. Ram is Rem’s sister. That fact will never change, even if this girl resents or hates Ram… Then, so that things might get better, we can only rely on each other.”

Subaru: “——Rem… won’t hate you.”

Ram: “Yes, I am certain sure you are correct—— She is a very smart girl. My amazing little sister.”

Like this, Ram smiled, brimming with confidence, and looked at Subaru with her light-crimson eyes.

Though she had no memories of her little sister except through Subaru, since she came to love her, she no longer doubted her feelings.

It was better to forge a better future, rather than to lament the past.

Subaru: “…What you’re telling me strikes home too damn hard, you know.”

Unbeknownst to Ram, Subaru had labored very hard to change the past quite some times.

For Ram, who was an extremely positive thinker, it would not be too much to describe Subaru’s using of Return by Death as being an extremely regressive form of thinking.

Return by Death, which changed what had already occurred, was always used because there were regrets about the past.

Subaru: “In the end, it’s better not to use it, huh…”

Subaru once again loosened his tightly clenched fist, smiling bitterly.

He recognized that his attitude was one of persevering via the use of Return by Death, in order to seize a better future where everyone could smile together. In addition, he also knew he should not indulge himself too much in the use of Return by Death itself.

Even in this Tower, Subaru had seen so many tears being shed, and heard so many voices full of regret for his sake.

Meili: “Although I’m not sureee, onii-san looks to be a bit betteeer.”

Seeing the change in Subaru’s expression, Meili whispered that whilst sitting on the floor. She was sitting on the floor grasping her knee, and, while stroking her three-strand braid, spoke,

Meili: “Nee-san and Ram-neesama can do iiit, but I’d be in trouble if you felt down since I can’t cheer you uuup, so please don’t feel dooown. You promised me you’d show me how much I could depend on you to get things done, riiight?”

Subaru: “Oh, there was that promise as well. Uh, well, I’ll definitely keep it this time.”

Gazing at Meili and the Mini-Crimson Scorpion on her head, Subaru nodded his head vigorously.

To the side, Patrasche nuzzled her head against his cheek, as if supporting his determination. Though her scaly body was tough, since he had gotten used to it, he could rub his cheeks against it without feeling uncomfortable.

Subaru returned that show of deep affection with deep affection of his own, then stood up.

Although he had consumed so much energy before that had he collapsed earlier, some of his lost stamina had been somewhat restored. The Spirit of the Green Room had a variety of healing methods at its disposal.

Subaru: “If I think about it, whether it be Gian who joined the big battle, or the Spirit in this room, I don’t know how to thank them enough for everything they’ve done.”

Shaula had explained that although the Green Room was used as a recovery room, there was a Spirit here originally that was fond of treating the injuries of living beings who entered the room.

It did not have a physical form, nor was it possible to converse with the Spirit, but its intention for healing others was crystal clear. Subaru and the others had been healed time after time by this room as they attempted to overcome the Tower, during which they would not stop getting new injuries.

It was for that reason that, after arriving at the Watchtower, Rem, among others, had been left in this room.

Subaru: “Weeell, I didn’t let her stay here just because I wanted her to stay here.”

Ram: “The Spirit, is it. Barusu… No, it would be a waste to say it. Why do we not force it to materialize itself through the effect of Julius’s Divine Protection of Gathering Spirits?”

Subaru: “I know what you’re trying to say, but it won’t work on me since my charm’s the Beako special attack. Anyways, I wonder if we can talk to it through Julius’s Divine Protection…”

The Divine Protection of Gathering Spirits was simply a Divine Protection that made it easier for him to be liked by Spirits. Under that effect, he had Contracted with his six Quasi Spirits—— no, Ia and the others, who had been elevated into Spirits. If he could use that effect to converse with the Spirit of the Green Room, it would open up a world of possibilities.

The Spirit had been in the Tower for as long as Shaula, if not longer.

That nameless being could possibly help them in solving the mysteries in the Watchtower——

Ram: “——?”

While Subaru was immersed in his thoughts, a small breath was suddenly let out within the room.

The one to spill that sigh and scrunch up their pretty eyebrows, was Ram. Her light-crimson eyes still narrowed, she directed her line of sight around the inside of the room.

Subaru: “Ram? What’s the matter?”

Ram: “…I sensed something strange. This is…”

——And at the time Ram voiced her presentment of an abnormality, it happened.

Subaru: “——Hk!?”

Meili: “What!?”

Suddenly, a phenomenon occurred in the middle of the Green Room—— light spilled out, shocking Subaru and the others.

In response to that, their bodies suddenly stiffened, and Subaru and Ram gravitated over to where Rem was. Meili and Patrasche also seemed to be wary of it, both slowly moving away from the light.

Meili: “Whatwhatwhat, what’s happening!?”

Subaru: “I don’t know! In any case, do not leave us! No matter what happens… Uwah!?”

Subaru shielded the flurried Meili behind him, halting his words of caution.

The reason laid in the light in the room having suddenly become brighter, searing Subaru’s eyes. Then, while covering his eyes with his hands, cautiously, Subaru focused his eyes on the light.

He could see that the currently strong light was gradually becoming weaker, and then it disappeared. Unsure of whether he should be feeling relieved or vigilant over that, “something” appeared in front of Subaru’s eyes.

Subaru: “——Huh?”

Seeing the “something” that had appeared right in front of his eyes in the spot where the light disappeared, Subaru was unsure of what it meant.

He became speechless, then stunned, and then speechless once more.

Ram: “…A girl?”

Next to Subaru, seeing the same thing as him, was Ram, who had muttered that in suspicion.

That perception was correct. Subaru also had the same view as she did. However, between him and her, she did not have the same knowledge of the “girl” that Subaru did.

Subaru knew the name of that “girl”.

The justification as to why, was because the name of the “girl” lying on the floor of the Green Room was——

Subaru: “——Louis Arneb.”

△▼△▼△▼△

A girl, Louis Arneb, had appeared in the middle of the Green Room along with a light.

The youngest sister of the three siblings who made up the Sin Archbishops of Gluttony, known as Satiation, and someone who was not supposed to have a physical form—— her form showing up in the real world in this way rendered Subaru speechless.

However, Ram next to him did not fail to pick up on his words.

Ram: “Louis Arneb… The name of the last one of the Gluttonies, isn’t it?”

Subaru had yet to tell Ram the details about his encounter with Louis through the Book of the Dead during this loop. He had only mentioned that he’d had contact with her, but Ram had a very good memory indeed.

Now faced with this question, Subaru was a bit disturbed,

Subaru: “Ah, yeah, that’s right, she’s the last one of the Gluttonies… Louis Arneb. The little sister of Batenkaitos and Alphard…”

Ram: “——From what it seems, she is unconscious.”

Observing Louis calmly, Subaru determined that she was indeed asleep as per Ram’s words.

If this specific situation ought to be called sleep however was wholly unknown. How in the world could Louis, who did not even possess a physical body, appear here like this?

It was difficult for him to imagine that she, who had been scared, terrified even of Subaru, who had been in despair because of Return by Death, would somehow reinvigorate herself within a few hours and come back to challenge him again.

——The thing known as Death, was something that left a deep wound in a person's heart.

Subaru: "I can't reach an answer after thinking about it… Meili! Go get Emilia-tan and the others! Ram and I will keep an eye on her!"

Meili: "Reaaally, you're such a slave driveeer… Don't let yourself die easily, 'kaaay?"

Gradually moving backwards, Meili moved towards the entrance of the Green Room. Subaru heard her admonishments, and gave her a thumbs up before she left.

He saw the Mini-Crimson Scorpion above her head put up its pincers as if imitating her, before she quickly turned around to go get Emilia and the others.

And then, in the room where Subaru and Ram remained——

Subaru: "I don't think anything will happen, but in any case, should we tie her up with ivy?"

Ram: "I would rather not provoke them… Barusu, have you noticed it yet?"

Subaru: "——? Noticed what?"

When Subaru tried to discuss how they should handle Louis, Ram stopped him by grabbing his shoulder, and posed him that question. Not seeming to understand the purpose of her question, he cocked his head.

So, with her chin, Ram pointed at the ceiling of the Green Room—— no, at the entire room.

Ram: "——The healing effects of the room have disappeared. The Spirit is gone."

Subaru: "Huh… That's a joke, right?"

Ram: "It is no jest. Barusu, even you will be able to feel it if you concentrate. There is an emptiness in this place."

Spurred on by Ram's statement, Subaru looked around the room.

Even if he were told to concentrate, the way Subaru would feel the presence of a Spirit was by picking them up, kissing their face, sleeping together, and so on. He was not sure about other ways of doing it.

However, just as Ram had stated, he could no longer feel the gentle waves that had previously wrapped around his entire body.

It seemed that something had indeed happened, for the Green Room's Spirit was present no more——

Ram: "If that is so, then perhaps it has something to do with the Sin Archbishop."

Subaru: "————"

Subaru could not deny Ram's conjecture.

He also had a similar thought. The Spirit in the Green Room had disappeared, replaced by Louis Arneb. Then, perhaps——

Ram: "——At any rate, it is best to not jump to any conclusions. We should wait for Emilia-sama and Beatrice-sama to return. Once Emilia-sama and the others come back——"

We can continue our discussion on what to do with Louis.

He thought that that was what Ram was about to say, most likely.

However, Ram did not continue her words.

Before she did—— the blackness that led to the demise of all, swooped down onto Pleiades Watchtower.

Ram & Subaru: "——Hk!?"

With a bang, a huge explosion went off at their feet, causing Subaru and the others to get thrown into the air.

Right afterwards, his entire body crashed into the ceiling and the walls with utmost strength, making him let out a "Guh!" Then turning his head, Subaru perceived what had occurred.

——The hairs of his entire body stood on end, with a vile presence drawing near.

Subaru: "No… way…"

In a state of disbelief, Subaru stood up, denying that foreboding feeling in his gut. But, with those chills growing stronger and stronger, Subaru's suspicions were made more and more real.

That, was an obstacle he thought would not arrive—— in truth, he had not expected this to occur until now. But in spite of that, it had indeed arrived at this place as large-scale destruction.

Subaru: "Patrasche! Take Ram——!"

Patrasche: "——Dodogyuuun!"

As he travelled along the floor on hands and knees, he grabbed Ram's body, who had yet to get up, and right after threw her over to Patrasche.

Though her body was still riddled with innumerable wounds, Patrasche understood his intentions; catching Ram's body and putting upon her back, the former performed a resolute dash towards the room's entrance.

Ram: "Barusu, you fool…!"

Ram resented that forceful action, but there was no time to listen to her.

The ground under his feet was unstable, yet Subaru took firm steps, speeding towards Rem on the bed made of ivy. Then taking her body up in his arms, he followed Patrasche towards the entrance to the room——

Subaru: "————"

——Just before that, Louis's figure tumbling on the grass passed by the edge of his vision.

Subaru: "——Hk! Ahhh, shit! SHIT!!"

While spewing out curses angrily, Subaru exerted his worn-out body to its absolute utmost. With Rem's body held by his right hand, he used his free left hand to grab Louis's arm by force.

Both of them were rather light. In extraordinary circumstances like this, it was possible for him to ignore the weight as he carried them.

Like this, carrying both of them, he was on the verge of leaping out of the Green Room.

???: “————”

As if trying to cut Subaru off from the entrance, emerging through the floor of the Green Room, a black shadow flowed in—— indeed, a black shadow.

The last one among the five obstacles, the one he had believed would not show its face—— the sable shadow of the Witch who held an obsession towards Subaru, was now, at the final moments, assaulting the Watchtower.

Subaru: “Ram——!”

Screaming maniacally, Subaru attempted to let Rem and only Rem escape the shadow from an opening in its mantle.

However, the black shadow engulfed Subaru’s frontal field of vision, leaving not even a gap. Moreover, the black shadow did not stop flowing in, engulfing him not only from the front, but from the left, from the right, from the back.

Subaru: “Shit… Even though, I’ve made it this far…!”

Gazing at the shadow inching closer and closer, Subaru’s heart was dominated by regret as he tried to find a way to escape.

If the black shadow were to swallow him, he would lose his life, and end up Returning by Death. If he Returned by Death in the Watchtower, and his respawn point had not been updated, then Subaru would have to start over at a point when Louis Arneb was still within him.

If that happened, he would again be at the mercy of the Sin Archbishop in the shape of a white girl.

That fear was what had driven him to do his best with the attitude that this loop was his last chance——

Ram: “BARUSU! SNAP OUT OF IT! REM WOULD CRY!!”

Patrasche: “——DODOGYUUUN!!”

Coming from beyond the black shadow, were the desperate cries of Ram and Patrasche.

He had taken a deep breath to reply, however, he had been unable to voice out those words.

——Long before that, the entirety of Natsuki Subaru had been swallowed up by the black shadow.

△▼△▼△▼△

——Having been swallowed up by the immense black shadow, Subaru's consciousness slowly swirled around in the darkness.

Subaru: "————"

Hands, feet, blood and flesh, it felt as if his very existence had been broken apart, turned into concepts.

Somehow consumed by endlessly powerful and vast emotions, his very existence had been overwritten.

???: "——I love you."

In that silent and pitch-dark nothingness, he heard a murmur from someone.

That sound seemed to be very nostalgic for him indeed, causing Natsuki Subaru's consciousness to give itself a deprecating smile.

Getting used to someone saying "I love you" to him, was akin to being the Knight who was loved by his six Spirits.

Unfortunately, Subaru did not feel as confident in those words. The love he could give was limited to what he could do with his own two hands and back. So, those words just seemed unreasonable to him,

Subaru: "So? It's way too forced, you know…"

???: "——I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you."

Subaru: "Sorry, can't give you an answer to that… That phrase's a sensitive topic for me right now. I've just failed to grab the hand of a person who said that to me…"

???: "——I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you."

Subaru: "…Is there no way for us to hear each other? Then, hurry up and consume me."

In this nothingness, there was no hope of escaping from it alive.

So, Natsuki Subaru would lose his life, mercilessly, in the darkness.

He would not grieve over it, he would accept it and turn that feeling into anger, pushing himself onwards.

Subaru: "When I get back, the worst thing may be waiting for me. Louis would still have a clear head on her shoulders, she might try to, and actually steal Return by Death this time."

???: "——I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you."

Subaru: "But, I'm not gonna lose. I won't lose. No matter how many times it takes, I'll keep fighting. This time, I'll keep my promise."

???: "——I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you."

Subaru: "——I'll fight for tomorrow's tomorrow, no matter how many times it takes."

He would no longer be overwhelmed by the repetitive use of "I love you".

He felt sorry for it, but the heart that could be wounded by those words had gotten worn out a short while prior. This kind of "love" could not chain Natsuki Subaru down, any longer.

And yet, the words of love that were continuously uttered did not pay any mind to Subaru's rejection.

Indeed, the words of blind love came pouring in, coating the world, as Natsuki Subaru was engulfed by the dark——

???: "——I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.

I love you. I love…"

???: "——I, am Volcanica. In accordance with the ancient Covenant, I ask the will of thee who hath reached the summit."

The next instant, a terrific amount of azure light poured down from above, striking the darkness that had enveloped the world.

And thus, that fierce light then devoured the dark, and at once the color of the world changed——

It changed——

It, changed——

△▼△▼△▼△

???: "Ugh…"

Subaru groaned as he felt a rough sensation moving against his face and opened his eyes.

His consciousness slowly returned. And at the same time, on the other side of his open eyelids, his blurry vision gradually returned to normality, little-by-little an outline was revealed.

All throughout that, Subaru felt a rough sensation on his cheek.

Subaru: "Pat… rasche… I, got'cha. I got'cha. I'm awake. I'm awake already…"

Something pressed down on him without hesitation, and Subaru forced out a voice, his face getting licked all over.

He was unsure of just how tired he was, as the sounds coming from his throat were incredibly feeble, so he was not certain if his intentions were being communicated properly. The other person did not show any signs of stopping their skinship.

Subaru: “What a spoiled one you are… With that cuteness, I bet you could win the next *heroine contest*[328]…”

???: “Ahh, uh?”

Subaru: “Ahh… Uh…?”

After swallowing some saliva in his dry mouth, he managed to string along words, and got a response in return.

However, the answer Subaru had received was different from what he was expecting, causing him to stiffen his face. His cheek was being licked like mad, and, with the gradual fading of his vision’s blurriness, what appeared in front of him was——

???: “Uh, ah——?”

——Sitting on top of Subaru, licking his face, was Louis Arneb.

Subaru: “Uh, WAHHHHHH——!?”

Louis: “UAAAGH!”

Startled by that impossible sight, Subaru then immediately pushed Louis, who had been in front of him, away. Due to that action, she let out an anguished cry and rolled around on the grass.

Gazing at that sight, Subaru desperately slid his butt backwards,

Subaru: “W-w-w-what the fuck, you bitch!? What he hell are you trying to do?! Are you toying with me again…”

Louis: “Uhh, uhh? Uahh.”

Subaru: “No uahh’ing! What, what the hell… Did I, die…?”

[328] Yet another Engrish flip that just doesn’t work as well as Romaji since a suitable expression is a goddamn mouthful (主人公の好きぴ競演, read “*shujinkou no sukipi kyouen*”). Yeah.

Glaring at Louis in abject shock, Subaru's voice trembled with desperation. Right in front of Subaru was Louis, lying with her back to the grass, shaking her arms and legs like a child, groaning.

He did not understand what her intents were. What was her point in that—— no, before that,

Subaru: "What, where… is this place…?"

Without taking his eyes off Louis, Subaru observed his surroundings whilst staying vigilant.

Then, what came into his view was a lush, green prairie—— a place like a vast grassland, flowers swaying in the wind here and there.

Subaru: "————"

Such a sight would be impossible to see in the Augria Sand Dunes.

Well, to be precise, in that place, there were also things like flower gardens, the dens where Courtesan Bears lived, but this was not something that had been created artifically like that. The vegetation was definitely natural, here.

A little bit further away, Subaru could see a forest, plunging his mind into confusion.

These were not the Augria Sand Dunes, clearly. It did not seem to be the Hall of Memories where he had encountered Louis before, either.

Subaru: "The grass seems pretty real. And it tastes like… Peh, peh! Grass!"

After pulling up some grass and checking its smell and taste, Subaru got confirmation that it was genuine.

Then, basing it on the injuries he possessed and the state of his torn clothing, he confirmed that the traces from the battle just before—— from the battle surrounding the Pleiades Watchtower, had remained.

That was to say, that the battle had taken place, and Subaru had yet to die.

Albeit he had been swallowed by the massive black shadow that had assaulted the Green Room, he had survived——

Subaru: "——That's right! Rem! Rem is…"

If Louis was right here in front of him, that meant that Rem, who he had also had in his grasp at that time, ought to be around this place as well.

Based on that idea, Subaru left Louis by herself, and searched around the grassland for Rem. It did not take long for him to find her soundless figure lying down in the low-cut grass.

Subaru: "Rem! Ahh, I'm glad… You're safe and sound…"

Rushing over to Rem, Subaru confirmed that she was indeed safe, then fell to the ground in relief.

From what he was able to see, she was not donning any external injuries either. Her body temperature and slow breathing were just as they were before. Relieved from the bottom of his heart, Subaru wiped away the sweat on his brow.

Subaru: "Haaa, what a relief. Nee-sama'd kill me if anything happened to Rem, anyways…"

Even if Ram did not do anything, Subaru would go ahead and off himself since he would not be able to forgive himself.

While having such thoughts, with an utter of "Then again…", Subaru raised his head,

Subaru: "Where's this place… Where's the Tower at? Where are Emilia-tan, Beako, and the others…?"

Looking around at his surrounding, he still could not find the Watchtower that was supposed to be visible in the distance.

No matter where he looked, the result was the same.

Subaru: "EMILIA——!! BEAKO!! RAM——!!"

Louis: "Uhh, ahhh!"

Even if he was unable to see them, there was a possibility that they would respond, so Subaru called out to Emilia and the others.

However, his voice beget hollowness, and the only one who answered was Louis, sprawled out atop the grass. Although that fact annoyed him, it was also true that he could not ignore her presence.

With no way of knowing what she was trying to do, nor with a way to deal with whatever it might be, the only one who could protect Rem was himself, so he got up so he could deal with Louis, and——

???: "————"

——When he was about to get on his feet, someone gently grabbed onto his arm.

Subaru: "——Huh?"

Subaru, currently on one knee and about to stand up, emitted a gruff breath.

The strength of the arm pulling on his sleeve was not much. Despite that, he could not move an inch.

Subaru: "————"

His knees began to creak and tremble, his whole body began to sweat.

In truth, it was an incomprehensible urge. His viscera stirred in unison, the being known as Natsuki Subaru, upon that phenomenon, in its entirety, lost all control.

That, was a shock that could not be described in words.

Those, were intense emotions that could not be compared to anything else.

That, of all the great surprises he had savored in this world, was as big as a massive wave.

Subaru: "——Ah."

Slowly, her eyelids trembled, and started opening, slightly.

Beneath those closed eyelids were her pale blue eyes, as clear as the surface of a lake.

He loved her happy and cheerful eyes.

He loved the twinkle in her eyes when she occasionally acted mischievously.

He loved the eyes that grasped his heart when she pleaded with him.

——He had always, always, always, yearned for that radiance.

Subaru: “Re…”

His heart thumping, his throat quivering, he was unable to produce a sound as if something were lodged in his throat.

It was lodged. Indeed it was. How many thoughts were swirling around, filling his chest, at this moment?

The words he had wished to convey to her, the things he had wished to converse with her, the dreams he had wished to share with her, all of these had been accumulating.

In pursuit of these very things, Natsuki Subaru——

Subaru: “——Rem.”

His lips trembling, he called out her name.

Deplorably, he had failed countless times trying to do just that.

He wondered if he could have spoken towards her with more clarity. Perhaps, he had only been able to do so in his own fantasies, he thought, and the most important thing was not being conveyed.

Out of fear, Subaru gasped out her name repeatedly.

Subaru: “Rem, Rem… Remm, Remm… *Reh, mh*… REM!”

Each time he called out her name, he could not stop his tears from overflowing like a flood.

Each time tears flowed out of his eyes, her figure became blurred. And whenever she became obscured, he became afraid she would slip through his fingers once more.

And so, with snot falling out like rain, desperately wiping his face with his sleeve, Subaru attempted to keep her face in his view, frantically.

Rem: “————”

With a pleasant sound, she gently blinked, a faint, yet certain light dwelling in her eyes.

Having gotten to this point, Subaru understood this was not simply a deception being shown due to his desires.

Without doubt, she—— Rem, was here.

Rem: "——Ah…"

Her lips moving weakly, Rem appeared to be trying to say something.

By hearing only that weak sound of her voice, Subaru's heart was on the brink of bursting.

All the time, he would talk to her sleeping face, and, in order to confirm that she still had life, would check her breathing as she slept.

Ushering in countless mornings and nights, Subaru had vowed to get her back.

However, not once had he heard her voice in all this time.

Upon closing his eyes, he would recall the words she had said to him, how she would call out his name, and all sorts of other scenes—— But all of that belonged to the past.

Today, tomorrow, he wanted to hear her voice in a more recent manner.

Now that wish had finally come true. It had been fulfilled.

Subaru: "*Reh, mh*… It's fine. It's okay, so take your time…"

Rem: "——Uh…"

Mumbling, she anxiously moved her lips.

Honestly, he thought he should grab her a glass of water or something for her now. However, there did not seem to be a water source available near them, and it was impossible for him to tear his eyes away from her.

Just a single word. If she were to call out to Subaru once more.

Once he heard that word, he would——

Rem: "——You…"

Subaru: "…Rem?"

In silence, Rem sped up the movements of her lips, seeking out any ounce of moisture in her mouth.

Moistening her tongue with the saliva she secreted, she finally regained enough strength to open her mouth.

Then, with Subaru reflected in her light blue eyes, she opened her mouth, and said——

Illustration from Volume 25, coloring by CM_2 (source)

Rem: “——Who… are you?”

Subaru: "————"

The sound that spun from her lips, tied together with significance, permeated into Subaru's mind.

——Who are you?

Subaru: "————"

Subaru knelt down, gazing at Rem's expression, holding his breath.

Then, painfully exhaling the accumulated breath in his lungs, he pounded on his chest.

Harder and harder, twice, thrice, urging himself.

——He should have expected this possibility.

Subaru had considered the possibility that Rem would possibly not remember him upon waking up.

It was only natural to think so, if he were to take the Authority of Gluttony into account. There was a high possibility of her waking up without her Name or Memories.

Indeed, it had been quite likely. So, it was not like he had never considered that she would be in lack of memories.

And, of course, the shock and pain he was feeling right now would not dissipate just because of that, either.

Even if that were the case, no longer would Subaru curse fate and live in despair, no longer would he rage at the absurdity of it all, no longer would he pretend to be the protagonist of a tragedy and feel sorry for himself.

Most important of all, Natsuki Subaru had already been told something by her.

Rem: "Please show me how awesome you can be. Subaru-kun."

Subaru: "——My name is Natsuki Subaru."

Gritting his molars hard, Subaru threw away his anguished expression and pulled his cheeks up.

Ridding his face of that impression, putting up bravado to the most of his ability, Subaru flashed Rem a smile.

A radiant smile, without reason as to its radiance, as was typical of Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “You may not be able to remember it for now. But, I’m…”

Rem: “You are…”

Faced with Rem’s hoarse question, Subaru paused, shut his eyes tightly.

And then, his black eyes fixed on her light blue eyes, he continued.

Subaru: “I’m, your hero—— I’ve missed you, Rem.”

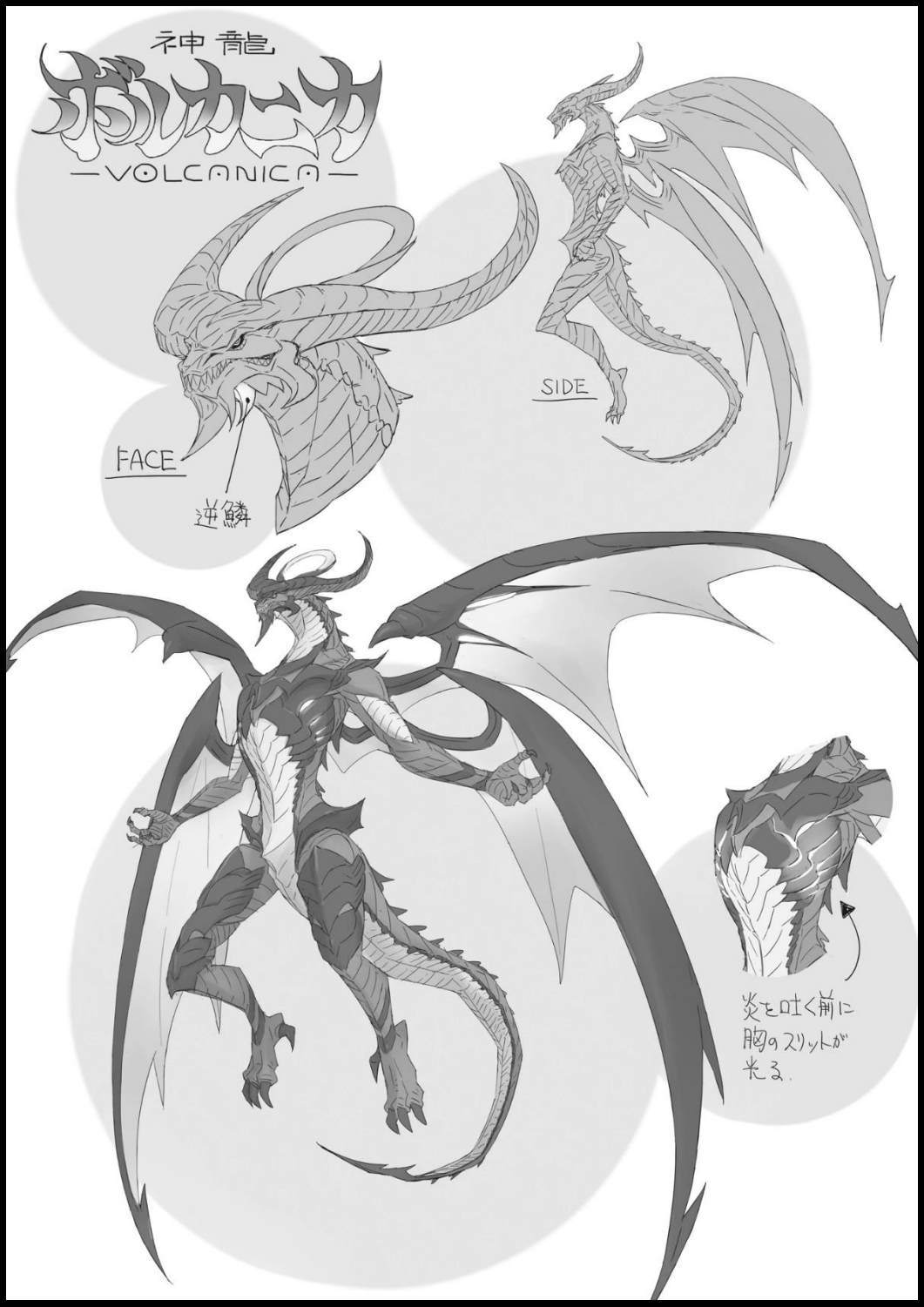
With those words, for the sake of the girl he had made a vow to, once more, Natsuki Subaru introduced himself as her hero.

Bearing the image of a hero riddled in wounds, the young boy once again gave his name, for the sake of the young girl.

——Once again, here, and now, he made a vow. To start a story with her, from zero.[329]

[329] Author’s note: “Heyhey. With this, Arc 6 of Re: Zero, which took a long, long time, has finished. Ahhn? But everything’s a mess still? That’s what you may think, but this is the correct path, as the Arc changes from here on out precisely. What will happen to the Watchtower and the many unsolved enigmas it leaves behind, and what will happen to Subaru’s group, who have been sent to some unknown place? Please do look forward to the start of Arc 7, in a few days. I’ll start at my leisure, once work on Volume 25 of the serialization is complete. Well then, best regards!”

Character Pages for Volume 25


神龍
ボルカニカ
VOLCANICA
FACE
逆鱗
SIDE
炎を吐く前に
胸のスリットが
光る.

Other Volumes

Main Story (Root folder at Link)

- **Arc 1** (Single volume)**:**
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- **Arc 4** (Full arc at Link)**:**
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  - **Volume 11** - Link;
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- **Arc 5** (Full arc at Link)**:**
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- **Arc 6** (Full arc at Link)**:**
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    - **Volume 37 -** Link;
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- **Arc 9** (Full arc at Link):
    - **Volume 39 -** Link;
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    - **Volume 41 -** Link;
    - **Volume 42 -** Link;
    - **Volume 43 -** Link;
    - **Volume 44 -** Link.

Side Content (Root folder at Link)

- **Side Stories:**
    - **Heroic Tale from Zero** (Arc 2 spoilers) - Link;
    - **Oni Sisters of the Hidden Village EX** (Arc 4 spoilers) - Link;
    - **Artbook Short Stories** (various) - Link.
- IFs:
    - **Rem IF** (Arc 2 spoilers) - Link.